

**Qualitative Study of the German Modal Particle *ja* in Internet Messaging**

**A Senior Honor Thesis**

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**by**

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## 1. Introduction

Technological developments such as cell phones, computers, and the internet have undoubtedly altered the way humans interact. Text-based communication by means of text messages, e-mails, web chats and internet message boards has become a common and almost necessary part of everyday life, effecting both professional and social aspects of the human experience. Computer-mediated communication has received much attention from researchers, with previous studies (mostly following conversation analytic methodology) focusing on interactional features of both synchronous forms of communication such as web chats and asynchronous forms such as e-mail and internet message boards (Hinrichs 1998; Crystal 2001; Schönfeldt & Golato 2003; Toye 2006; Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm 2006; Marcoccia 2004; Tanskanen & Karhukorpi 2008). These studies examine conversations held on the internet, often comparing and contrasting features of online communication with previously analyzed features of verbal communication (i.e. face-to-face or telephone interaction) in order to describe features of interactions within these novel communication mediums. For example, repair initiations and the negotiation of face in German conversations have been examined within internet relay chats (Schönfeldt & Golato 2003; Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm 2006). One common feature of the German language which has yet to be examined in online interactions is the modal particle, which is a lexical item frequently used in colloquial spoken German. This paper will contribute to findings on the usage of modal particles, as well as to previous research on computer-mediated interactions by examining the function of the modal particle *ja* in assessments within conversations held on the German social networking website studiVZ (*Studentenverzeichnis*).

To begin, I will define the term “modal particle” and discuss previous studies of the modal particle *ja* (section 2). Next, I will describe the social networking website studiVZ, with particular emphasis on how communication via studiVZ compares to verbal interaction and other forms of computer-mediated communication (section 3). The next section will cover the methodologies implemented in this study, beginning with an explanation of how data was collected and analyzed, and how working from a conversation analytic perspective shaped the focus of this research project. I will then

discuss characteristics of conversation analysis, which is the methodological framework chosen for this study due to its qualitative nature and focus on interactional organization. This will lead to a discussion of preference organization and sequence organization, as the design and sequential order of comments made within the conversations collected on studiVZ will be considered when examining the interactional environment of *ja* within assessments. After presenting what previous conversation analytic studies have found concerning assessments, I will introduce and analyze segments from this data corpus which contain either first pair part or second pair part assessments with *ja* (section 5). By focusing on the interactional environment of the modal particle *ja* within first pair part assessments, specifically self-deprecations, negative assessments and positive assessments, as well as within second pair part assessments produced in response to a question, in response to an announcement or news, or after a prior assessment, this paper will provide a better understanding of the usage and function of *ja* within this particular communication medium. Implications of these findings and ideas for further research on modal particles will be discussed in the final section (section 6).

## 2. Modal Particles

The term “particle” within linguistic works has been used in a variety of ways, and therefore must be specifically defined for this study. According to Duden Grammatik der deutschen Gegenwartssprache (Grebe et al. 1966), particles are considered to be all lexical items that cannot be inflected. By this definition, particles include conjunctions, prepositions, and adverbs, among other words that are not classified as nouns, verbs, or adjectives. For this study, however, a more specific definition of particles will be used.

Indeed, the particles examined in this paper cannot show inflection, but they also cannot have a syntactic function such as other non-inflectable words (Helbig 1988, p. 20). In fact, if these particles were eliminated from the sentences they occur in, the sentences themselves would still be grammatically correct. Heringer (1988) and Weydt (1969) suggest that particles such as the type examined in this study do not fit within a grammatical category, but rather are members of a *Funktionsklasse* ‘function class’

(Heringer 1988, p. 733-734; Weydt 1969, p. 68). Although syntactically speaking, particles can be “disregarded,” these lexical items modify an utterance in a particular way such that their removal would change the semantic and pragmatic interpretation of the utterance.

In the literature, three subclasses of particles have been defined based on how they affect the meaning of an utterance and which part of the utterance they modify: *Steigerungspartikeln* (intensifying particles), *Gradpartikeln* (particles of degree), and *Abtönungspartikeln* (‘modal’ or ‘flavoring’ particles) (Helbig 1988; Weydt 1969; Hentschel 1986), which have also been called *Einstellungspartikeln* (Doherty 1987), *Modale Partikeln* (Kriwonossow 1977), or *Modalpartikeln* (Lindner 1991; Jacobs 1991; Weydt 1977; Molnár 2002 ). For this study, the focus is on what I will call **modal particles (MPs)**, which are particles that “shade a speaker’s message” (Lindner 1991) by expressing a variety of meaningful nuances, ranging from intensifying adjectives or adverbs to conveying attitudes and expectations of the speaker (Helbig & Helbig 1995). These particles are used extensively in everyday speech and often reflect a native-like competence or “feel” for the language. The majority of these lexical items have meanings that are rather complex and dependent upon the social situational context in which they occur. In one of the first works published on modal particles, Weydt (1969) claimed that modal particles do not change the “truth value” of an utterance (i.e. literal interpretation), as they make no contributions to the propositional content of a sentence, but rather they help to show a speaker’s attitude about the topic being discussed. Weydt (1969) also notes that modal particles work together with nonverbal and paralinguistic aspects of communication such as laughter, eye contact, winking, intonation, accenting, and speech tempo to reveal a speaker’s stance toward the subject matter of a statement (Weydt 1969, p. 60-66).

In the last several decades, there has been a significant increase in empirical linguistic research on these particles and their function in the German language. As shown above, the various names attributed to this particular lexical item reflect different research positions, each of which focusing on a specific feature of modal particles. Efforts have been made in order to systematize and categorize these particles based on their communicative function (Weydt et al. 1983; Helbig 1988; König 1997; Hentschel

1986). Several texts have attempted to describe the meaning and usage of modal particles, often outlining specific syntactic and semantic properties, such as those listed below (Lindner 1991; Jacobs 1991; Abraham 1991; Weydt 1969):

- MPs occur only in the *Mittelfeld* ‘middle field’ of a sentence<sup>i</sup>
- MPs can take any adverbial position within the *Mittelfeld*
- Each MP can only occur in particular sentence types
- Some MPs can occur in combinations
- MPs modify the illocution type of the sentences they occur in

Due to the particular methodology chosen for this study, I will not be examining any of the above properties specifically; I merely present them here to give an idea of what other researchers of modal particles have investigated and concluded. In the analyses below in section 5, I will refer to prior claims about the syntactic positioning and semantic functioning of modal particles. However, I present these findings in conjunction with a description of the context in which the particular semantic meaning of the modal particle is applicable. Thus, this study does not specifically analyze the semantic and syntactic properties of modal particles, but rather provides examples in which previous claims about the semantic functioning and syntactic positioning of modal particles can be observed within this particular context.

In this paper, I will only be examining the modal particle *ja* ‘yes,’ as it is the most used modal particle of the present-day German language (Molnár 2002) and it has been the focus of many previous studies on modal particles. In addition to its common occurrence as a positive answer to a yes/no question, *ja* has been shown to serve many other functions in the spoken German language. According to previous studies, when functioning as a modal particle, *ja* can appear in declarative, exclamatory, and imperative sentences (Weydt et al. 1983; Helbig 1988; Lindner 1991, Molnár 2002). In Kleine deutsche Partikellehre (Weydt et al. 1983) and Lexicon deutscher Partikeln (Helbig 1988), *ja* is said to express *Meinen* ‘opinion’ when in a declarative statement, *Staunen* ‘astonishment’ when in an exclamatory statement, *Warnen und Drohen* ‘warning and threat’ when occurring in an imperative statement, and *Ablehnung* ‘negative answer’ in the form of *ja nicht* ‘yes no.’ The modal particle *ja* can also occur in *Entscheidungsfragen* ‘wh-questions’ in connection with the modal particle *auch*. It is

important to note that within these resources and many others dealing with the semantics of modal particles, the meaning of *ja* is closely tied to whether it is *betont* ‘accented’ or *unbetont* ‘non-accented.’ As this study will be examining text-based conversation, the use of an accented or non-accented *ja* cannot be determined, and therefore will not be considered in analysis. However, it is interesting to note that although interactants conversing on the internet cannot place accent on words in the same way as in verbal conversation, they still produce modal particles in computer-mediated communication.<sup>1</sup>

In the literature on modal particles, example sentences of particle usage are often provided. However, even though particles are used almost exclusively in verbal interaction, most previous studies examined the usage of particles either in written forms of the language (i.e. novels or plays) (Lindner 1991) or in interactions with elicited, unnatural contexts (Hentschel 1986). For example, Hentschel writes that “the sentences from which the following meanings of the particles [*ja* ‘yes’, *doch* ‘but’, *halt* ‘just’, and *eben* ‘even’] should be determined are almost exclusively contrived examples” (Hentschel 1986).<sup>2</sup> Another example can be found from Resenede (1995), where he writes, “1067 example sentences with the flavoring particle *doch* ‘but’, 803 with *ja* ‘yes’, 78 with *eben* ‘even’ and 68 with *halt* ‘just’ serve as a corpus. I abstracted these sentences from a total of 27 stage plays” (Resenede 1995).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the majority of studies on modal particles do not present the reader with the entire conversation in which a statement containing a modal particle occurred, nor is an analysis provided of the context surrounding the statement with a modal particle, even though these studies recognize that the function of a modal particle is context-dependent (Lindner 1991; Helbig 1988; Hentschel 1986).

By investigating the syntactic and semantic properties of modal particles, researchers have attempted to classify particles and make generalizations about their behavior. In his speech-act-theoretic study, Waltereit (2001) refers to König’s (1997)

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<sup>1</sup> Writing a word in all capital letters, with spacing between the letters, or surrounded by asterisks are all ways to add extra emphasis to a word within a sentence, similar to accenting a word in verbal speech (Crystal 2001, p. 87). However, none of the collected samples of *ja* displayed these features, and therefore cannot be considered to be “accented.”

<sup>2</sup> Bei den Sätzen, anhand derer im folgenden die Bedeutung der Partikeln im einzelnen untersucht werden soll, handelt es sich fast ausschließlich um erfundene Beispiele (Hentschel 1986).

<sup>3</sup> Als Korpus deuten insgesamt 1067 Beispielsätze mit der Abtönungspartikel *doch*, 803 mit *ja*, 78 mit *eben* und 68 mit *halt*, die ich aus insgesamt 27 Theaterstücken entnommen habe (Resenede 1995).

“metapragmatic approach” to the analysis of modal particles, in which König implies that MPs “serve to situate an utterance relative to some context, rather than to contribute to the meaning of the utterance itself” (Waltereit 2001; König 1997). Along those lines, this paper is concerned with the **pragmatic** function of the modal particle *ja* and the orientation of the conversation due to its usage. As an empirical qualitative study, this paper will be describing the modal particle *ja* based on examples of its actual use. Another major difference between this study and many of the previous studies on modal particles is that I will be examining the function of one particular modal particle, namely *ja*, as it occurs within **natural occurring** text-based data. Additionally, I will be including transcriptions of the conversations in which the particles occur, accompanied by an analysis of the conversations according to conversation analytic methodology.

### 3. Features of Interacting via studiVZ

Over 13 million users are registered on the social networking websites belonging to the company studiVZ Ltd. In 2006, the websites studiVZ.net, scheulerVZ.net and meinVZ.net were launched as the German versions of the popular American social networking site, Facebook. Funded entirely from advertisements, these virtual communities were created for students (in college and grade school) and designed to be used explicitly for social purposes (Über uns n.d.). The creators of studiVZ wanted to avoid "mindless Anglicisms," and hence the site's nomenclature is strictly German (Bakst 2006).

As most social networking websites, studiVZ has a membership system by which individuals create an account and select a screen name<sup>4</sup> that will appear on each posted comment by the member and serve to identify the individual within the virtual community. The only requirement for membership to studiVZ is an active e-mail address. An account with studiVZ affords the member with a profile which displays basic information about the user such as age, sex, attending university, and marital status, as well as personal information such as interests, music taste, and favorite books, films and quotes. Additionally, each user can upload a photo which appears in the top left-

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<sup>4</sup> Some members of studiVZ use their real names, while others use a nickname or pseudonym.

hand corner of his or her profile. This photo is generally of the user, but it doesn't have to be; some users upload a photo of a place, actor/actress, animal, band or group of people as their "profile picture." As studiVZ is a social networking website, its members can "friend" one another, which is when a user requests to be considered friends within the virtual community. Each member of studiVZ can control the privacy settings of his or her profile, and some members allow only users considered "friends" to access their profile, while other members make their profiles viewable to any member of the studiVZ network. Thus, "friendship" within the studiVZ social network allows users to selectively interact and associate with who they want to within the online community.

Forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) such as the interactions held on studiVZ constitute a new form of community that brings with it significant implications for interpersonal relations, social identities and frameworks of participation (Hutchby 2001). With a profile, a member can utilize several different applications to communicate and interact with other members. One such application is the *Nachrichtendienst* 'news service,' which is a private mailbox similar to e-mail that users can send messages to. Also, there are currently 600 million photos stored on the studiVZ server, as users can upload digital images into *Fotoalben* 'photo albums' that are accessible from their profile. Members can post comments under a picture by submitting text in a box labeled *Kommentar hinzufügen* 'add commentary.' Currently, studiVZ is the largest photo-community in the German-language-speaking realm (Über uns n.d.). On Facebook, users can "poke" each other, while one of studiVZ's creators, Ehssan Dariani, coined the term *gruscheln*, which users can "do" to each other by just clicking a button (Bakst 2006). Although users are not physically present when interacting with each other, the *gruscheln* application allows users of studiVZ to perform "actions" on other users. However, the action is not really carried out in the real world, as a user receives a *gruscheln* through a message that simply states *Du wurdest gegruschelt* 'you were [action],' and no action is actually performed on the user. Another way users show affiliation with one another is by joining a "group," which reflects the group members' shared point of view on an issue or mutual interest in a particular subject matter. Users can also update other members on their "status" by submitting text in a box on their profile labeled *Ich bin gerade...* 'I am currently..., ' which is displayed next to their



screen name when viewing their profile. A final way that users can interact on studiVZ is through the *Pinnwand*, which can be translated into English as either ‘bulletin board’ or ‘profile wall.’ A user can send a message by typing in a commentary box on another user’s profile, and then clicking on the word *Abschicken* ‘submit,’ which immediately posts the comment on the bottom of the recipient’s profile. However, unlike messages sent to a private mailbox, messages posted on a user’s bulletin board are displayed on his or her profile, and are therefore viewable to anyone who has access to that profile.

This study examines specifically interactions which occurred on profile walls or within photo albums (where comments appear in a bulletin board section displayed under a particular picture). An “interaction” should be understood as a series of messages posted by users on each other’s profile walls, or as a series of messages posted under a single picture within a photo album. Since studiVZ uses the term *Kommentar* ‘commentary’ to describe messages posted on a profile wall or under a picture, from this point on, participants in an interaction will be referred to as either “commenters” or “interactants.” A commenter begins an interaction by posting a comment under a picture in an album or on another user’s profile wall. Comments are displayed in the order in which they are posted, with the most recent comment occurring at the top of the commentary section. Comments remain within a bulletin board section unless deleted by either the commenter or the recipient, or removed by the website’s system administrators.

Although interactions on studiVZ are similar to other previously analyzed forms of CMC, specific features of conversing through this particular medium affect the way interactants communicate in a very unique way. Overall, studies on various forms of CMC suggest that online conversations such as those found in e-mails (Tanskanen & Karhukorpi 2008), internet discussion groups and newsgroups (Baym 1996; Baym 1998; Marcoccia 2004), and internet relay chats (Schönfeldt & Golato 2003; Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm 2006) exhibit features of both written and spoken language. Of these previously examined forms of CMC, interactions on studiVZ bulletin boards are most similar to internet newsgroup interactions, which can be considered “a hybrid between oral, written, interpersonal, and mass communication” since their text-based messages are visible to a large public audience, yet ostensibly addressed to a particular individual (Baym 1996, p. 320).

Indeed, studiVZ bulletin board postings are simultaneously personal and public, and as a result, commenters deal with the issue of “addressing” co-participants in a specific way. Within this data corpus, none of the initial comments that were posted under pictures were addressed to a specific person. These comments make reference to the photo itself or to the scene depicted in the photo, but the commenter does not explicitly indicate whether the comment is directed towards a mass audience or to a specific user. As a photo is accessible only through an album that is a part of a specific user’s profile, a comment posted under a photo can sometimes be considered to be addressed to the user whose profile the album occurs on. However, the majority of the photo comments within the collected data were responded to by co-participants other than the user who posted the album. Thus, photo commentary on studiVZ is a unique form of communication where the messages pertain to a known, accessible referent (i.e. the photo), but they are not specifically addressed to a particular recipient and they can be read and responded to by anyone who happens to view the photo.

Posting a comment on someone’s profile wall is different than providing photo commentary, as it can be assumed that the comment is addressed to the user whose profile wall the comment appears on. Although some data segments contain the name of the intended recipient, many do not. Therefore, even though wall postings are visible to anyone with access to a user’s profile, comments posted on profile walls make up part of a “dialogue,” in the sense that the conversation occurs between two people (i.e. the commenter and the user whose wall the comment is posted on), regardless if the intended recipient is defined.<sup>ii</sup>

A user’s profile wall usually has comments from a variety of different people, with each comment serving as part of an interaction with a specific person. Put differently, interactants participate in several independent parallel interactions on their bulletin boards, with only the co-participant’s portion of the interaction visible on their bulletin board. Moreover, both sides of the interaction cannot be viewed at the same time, and in order to view both sides of an interaction, one must click back and forth between the participants’ profiles. Although the appearance of wall postings on a user’s profile may suggest a lack of common focus and sequence organization, when the comments from each individual interaction are viewed together and in chronological

order, they can be understood as instances of **focused interaction**. As described by Goffman (1963) in his notes on the social organization of gatherings, participants can take part simultaneously in unfocused interaction and focused interactions (Goffman 1963). In communication via studiVZ, a participant takes part in an unfocused interaction consisting of all the comments displayed on his or her profile wall, while at the same time engaging in individual interactions comprised of comments posted under a photo or exchanged between two users. Other instances of focused interaction were found by Schönfeldt and Golato (2003) in internet relay chat conversations and by Marcoccia (2004) in internet newsgroup discussions.

Analogous to e-mail and newsgroup conversations, interactions on studiVZ are not just spatially distributed, but also temporally disjointed. Users cannot observe the production of messages other than their own. Participants do not have to be on-line simultaneously to converse using the studiVZ bulletin board functions. It is possible and acceptable that a receiver of a wall posting will not respond to a message for hours, days, or months, if at all.<sup>5</sup> Thus, studiVZ wall postings are a form of *asynchronous* computer-mediated communication, in which participants lack a common physical and temporal context. This leads to the issue of spontaneity, in the sense that commenters can “prepare” what they will type before actually submitting it. Commenters have the option of deleting parts of a comment before posting the comment, and in that way, studiVZ wall postings and photo comments can be considered premeditated in production. Wall postings are generally shorter than e-mails and informal in terms of content and structure; these features suggest a spontaneous, unprompted production. However, it is important to remember that any comment posted on a profile wall is visible to anyone who views that profile, and thus users may indeed take time to contemplate the content and structure of a comment before posting it.<sup>6</sup> How frequently users log into their account, the relationship between commenters, the nature of the interaction, and whether a commenter has the time or desire to post a comment are all factors that may influence when and how a studiVZ wall posting is produced.

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that the time at which a comment is posted appears with the comment.

<sup>6</sup> See section 4, p. 18, for further discussion of this issue

In his book titled Conversation and Technology, Hutchby (2001) cites Baym's (1996) assertion that the status of bulletin boards as communities has to do with a number of factors, including a development of norms of behavior which inform appropriate participation in the community, as well as an evolution of specific forms of expression used to communicate (Baym 1996; Hutchby 2001). As in other forms of text-based electronic exchange, conversations on studiVZ lack nonverbal cues, as interactants do not have visual or aural contact with each other. Previous studies suggest that users of computer-mediated communication have adapted to the medium and found ways to overcome the relative shortage of cue systems. Crystal (2001) found that the exaggerated use of spelling and punctuation, as well as the use of capitals, spacing, and special symbols for emphasis occur in text-based conversations as substitutes for paralinguistic aspects of communication (Crystal 2001, p. 34). Additionally, researchers suggest that a lack of visual cues such as head nodding, facial expressions, posture, and eye contact has resulted in users of CMC often incorporating emoticons as visual cues to augment the meaning of text-based messages (Walther & D'Addario 2001; Hutchby 2001; Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm 2006). Emoticons are textual configurations that are included in a message to indicate certain pragmatic or interpersonal effects to what is being conveyed (Hutchby 2001). Generally, emoticons represent facial expressions that appear sideways or facing forward.<sup>7</sup> Godin (1993) argues that until the advent of the emoticons, "individuals using electronic communication had no way to indicate the subtle mood changes. They couldn't tell jokes, use irony, slip in a pun or become bitingly sarcastic" (Godin 1993, p. 4). Moreover, emoticons have been found to accomplish such effects as avoiding giving offense, softening a rebuke in the course of an argument, marking one's intent as non-serious, and so on (Hutchby 2001; Walther & D'Addario 2001). Although emoticons have been claimed to be "the paralanguage of the internet" (Marvin 1995), it is unknown whether emoticons have the same intentional connotation as physical nonverbal behavior. Relative to face-to-face nonverbal communication, typed-out textual symbols may be considered more deliberate and voluntary, and it is still not clear if emoticons are interpreted "as iconic and unconscious like nonverbal facial expressions or, like wording, as deliberately encoded elements of intentional communication" (Walther & D'Addario

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 1 for examples of both sideways and forward-facing emoticons found in this data corpus.

2001, p. 329). Within this study, the intentionality issue of emoticons will not be considered when examining the relationship between modal particles and emoticons, which have both been said to serve a pragmatic function within a comment.

As discussed above, there are very few studies that have looked at the usage of modal particles within the context of naturally occurring spoken language. However, with the emergence of the internet, modal particles are now occurring in unelicited computer-mediated conversations. These interactions generally consist of casual and informal “everyday” conversation; users often make social plans, discuss issues of daily life, update each other on life conditions, evaluate shared experiences, and comment on aspects of each other’s profiles. Therefore, studiVZ offers an excellent data corpus to examine features of particles in natural German online conversation. Although particles occur primarily in verbal communication, interactions between speakers on a social networking website may provide (for the first time) natural text-based examples of particle usage in an online environment.

#### 4. Methodologies: Data Collection and Conversation Analysis

While studying abroad in Germany, I became aware of studiVZ and its popularity among German students. I created a profile for myself, and became an active member of the studiVZ virtual community. For this research project, I collected data from the profiles of users that were my “friends,” or from the profiles of users that did not restrict access to their profiles (i.e. any member of the studiVZ community can view the profile without requesting “friendship”).<sup>8</sup> I viewed approximately 100 different profiles and collected a total of 72 interactions which contained the modal particle *ja* in the ‘middle field’ of a sentence.<sup>9</sup> In order to analyze these comments, I copied them into a Microsoft Word document and put the comments of each interaction in chronological order. Initially, the goal of this study was to investigate if *ja* even occurred as a modal particle within comments posted on studiVZ. As I found many examples of *ja* in the ‘middle

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<sup>8</sup> The fact that I did not conduct “research on human subjects” as defined by the Institutional Review Board made this study exempt from IRB review. To protect participants’ anonymity, I have used pseudonyms in place of commenters’ screen names.

<sup>9</sup> See endnote i for further discussion of the *Mittelfeld* ‘middle field.’

field' of a sentence, the next step was to examine all of the interactional environments in which *ja* occurred as a modal particle. However, when I began to analyze the collected data samples, I found that *ja* occurred as a modal particle in a variety of different speech acts, including requests, suggestions, speculations, justifications/accounts, invitations, observations, and criticisms. In order to narrow the scope of this study, my research advisor and I examined the data further in order to find one specific speech event which frequently contained the modal particle *ja*, and we both found that many of the collected samples of *ja* occurred within assessments. Thus, the focus of this study (i.e. on the modal particle *ja* within assessments produced on studiVZ) was determined as a result of observation of the collected data of interactions.

In contrast to previous studies which have investigated syntactic and semantic properties of modal particles, this paper examines the pragmatic function of the modal particle *ja* by using conversation analytic methodology.

Pragmatics is concerned with how people use language within a context and why they use language in particular ways (Tserdanelis & Wong 2004). As the function of modal particles has been found to be context-dependent, in order to analyze their function within an interaction one must consider the pragmatics of that interaction. To do this, I will analyze not only the entire comment in which the sentence with *ja* occurs, but also responding comments which reveal how co-participants understand and deal with the prior remarks. In other words, I will be looking at the entire sequence of interaction and not just at a single sentence taken out of context.

For this study, I chose to use the methodology of conversation analysis, which is described by Heritage and Atkinson (1984) below:

The central goal of conversation analytic research is the description and explication of the competences that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible, socially organized interaction. At its most basic, this objective is one of describing the procedures by which conversationalists produce their own behavior and understand and deal with the behavior of others (Heritage & Atkinson 1984, p. 1).

By observing and describing the properties and organization of a conversation from the point of view of the interactants themselves, researchers using conversation analysis can study actions accomplished in conversations. Furthermore, conversation analysis focuses

on the local production of order and the methods which interactants use to create that order (Ten Have 1999).

Within conversation analysis, there are four types of interactional organization: turn-taking organization, repair organization, sequence organization, and the organization of turn-construction/design (also known as preference organization). In this study of modal particles, I will be considering the **sequence organization** and **preference organization** of the collected interactions in order to investigate the function and interactional environment of the modal particle *ja* within those interactions. The general idea that utterances in interactional talk are sequentially organized refers to the common experience that “one thing can lead to another” (Ten Have 1999). Furthermore, a participant in a conversation understands an utterance by reference to its position within the interaction, and thus by noting where an utterance occurs in a conversation, researchers can attempt to analyze individual utterances through examination of how the other interactant(s) analyzed and treated the prior utterance in their response. As this particular study examines the pragmatic function of the modal particle *ja*, a focus on sequential organization provides an advantage in the analysis of *ja* that was unavailable to previous researchers on modal particles, who examined isolated sentences or other “text” materials that could not be analyzed without hypothesizing or speculating about the possible ways in which utterances, sentences, or texts might have been interpreted (Heritage & Atkinson 1984, p. 9). This advantage to analyzing how a particular comment is actually used and interpreted within an interaction is another reason why conversation analysis was chosen as the methodological framework for this study.

The concept of **adjacency pairs** is the major instrument used for analysis of sequential organization, where adjacency pairs consist of sequences which have the following features: (1) two utterance length, (2) different speakers producing each utterance, and (3) adjacent positioning of component utterances (Ten Have 1999, p. 20; Schegloff & Sacks 1973). In the literature, it has been found that social activities such as requests, offers, invitations, etc. are accomplished through adjacency pairs, where one interactant produces the **first pair part** (e.g. a question) and a second interactant produces the **second pair part** (e.g. an answer) of the adjacency pair. Thus, a given interaction will be composed of a comment produced as a first pair part by one

interactant, followed by a comment produced as a second pair part by a second interactant (Schegloff 2007).<sup>10</sup>

In verbal interactions, turn-constructive units (TCUs), which are sentences, clauses, phrases or lexical items, compose a participant's turn within a conversation (Schegloff 2007). However, commenters participating in interactions on studiVZ produce a single message as their turn within a conversation. That message may be a composition of several distinct TCUs, containing various independently-related sentences, phrases, lexical items, and emoticons which constitute a participant's turn within a conversation. Thus, just as in e-mails, a single wall posting can consist of multiple adjacency pair parts and sequences which are portions of different conversations. As displayed in the example below, a single posted comment may contain both first pair parts and second pair parts of different adjacency pairs.

#### Example (i) Formal dance

1 Matthias: na nacken, alles fit?

*hey neck, everything fit?*

*hey [nickname], everything ok?*

2 wo hast gesteckt gestern? und was treibst so in der nächsten zeit?

*where have stuck yesterday? and what drives so in the next time?*

*where were you yesterday? and what are you up to in the future?*

3 lg de Matthias

*dear regards the [name]*

*best wishes<sup>11</sup> [name]*

4 Nick: na matti!!

*hey [nickname]!!*

*hey [nickname]!!*

5 jo läuft...bei dir???

*yes runs ... by you???*

*yes it's going . . . and with you???*

<sup>10</sup> Although a second pair part of an adjacency pair is generally expected to be produced directly after a first pair part, this does not always occur. For instance, a new sequence can be “inserted” into an ongoing sequence, such as a request for clarification or specification (Ten Have 1999, p. 113).

<sup>11</sup> lg is a shortening of the German phrase *liebe Grüße* ‘dear regards.’ In the idiomatic translation, lg is translated as ‘best wishes.’



- 6           war bei dem abiball von meiner freundin :)  
              *was at the [formal dance] of my girlfriend [se]*  
              *I was at my girlfriend's [formal dance] [se]<sup>12</sup>*
- 7           eiß noch nich...bei dir???
- know yet not ... by you???*  
              *I don't know yet ... how about you???*
- 8           lg de Nick
- dear regards the [name]*  
              *best wishes [name]*

In lines 1-3, Matthias produces several distinct first pair parts of adjacency pairs: a greeting, a personal state inquiry, a question about Nick's whereabouts the day before, a question about Nick's future plans, and a farewell. In Nick's reply (lines 4-8), a second pair part occurs in response to every first pair part produced in the prior message. In addition to these second pair parts, Nick produces first pair parts (a personal state inquiry and a question about Matthias' future plans) in lines 5 and 7. Thus, first pair parts and second pair parts of adjacency pairs can be found within studiVZ bulletin board posts, and a single post may contain independent components of different sequences and adjacency pairs. As a single posted comment constitutes a participant's turn in a conversation, it is possible for a commenter to produce any number of first pair parts and second pair parts within a single turn in a conversation.

The data in this corpus shows that comments posted as photo commentary are often not responded to by another user. This lack of a second pair part can most likely be contributed to the fact that photo comments are generally not addressed to a specific recipient, but rather to the studiVZ community at large. Additionally, commenters may continue a conversation through another medium of communication, such as private e-mail, telephone or even face-to-face conversation, as users of studiVZ often interact outside of the social networking community (particularly if they attend the same university or live in the same city).<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the data collected from conversations

<sup>12</sup> [se] = smile emoticon, see Appendix 1 for explanation of transcription notation

<sup>13</sup> Marcoccia (2004) and Baym (1996, 1998) noted instances of truncated exchanges within their data of internet newsgroup interactions, which they attributed to the lack of a specific addressee in messages accessible to a large public audience, as well as to the asynchronous nature of the medium.

occurring on users' profile walls suggests that the obligation to complete an adjacency pair may be as strong in profile wall postings as it is in internet relay chats and naturally occurring face-to-face and telephone conversations.<sup>iii</sup>

In addition to the sequential order of a comment in an interaction, it is also important to note the particular way an interactant builds a comment. Within conversation analysis, there is the concept of "recipient design," which implies that comments by a participant in a conversation are constructed or designed in a way which displays an orientation and sensitivity to the co-participant. Due to the fact that wall postings on studiVZ remain visible on a user's profile unless deleted, they are therefore viewable to anyone with access to the profile on which they are posted. Thus, in studiVZ bulletin board posts, commenters most likely design their remarks not only with the participants they are interacting with in mind, but also with the knowledge that the comment may be viewed by other people.

There are many different ways to perform any conversational action, and interactants choose to formulate comments in a certain way through "word selection, topic selection, the admissibility and ordering of sequences, the options and obligations for starting and terminating conversations, and so on" (Sacks et al. 1978, p. 42-3). The particular choice of an individual turn shape allows for different kinds of realizations of the actions being performed within that turn (Pomerantz 1984, p. 64). Of the possible turn shapes that interactants can produce, it has been shown that certain designs are "preferred" over others. For example, in English, the preferred second pair part in response to an offer is an acceptance of that offer, while a rejection of that offer would be considered a dispreferred response. In spoken and internet relay chat conversations, preferred second pair parts are generally produced without hesitation or justification, and dispreferred second pair parts often contain some sort of delay while frequently having a more complex turn design than preferred responses.<sup>iv</sup> Previous studies on preference organization have also shown that certain first pair parts are preferred practices. In general, first pair parts are structured so as to encourage the production of preferred responses and to prevent the occurrence of dispreferred responses. It was found in verbal and internet relay chat interactions that a first pair part that performs a dispreferred action may be constructed similar to a dispreferred second pair part, including such features as

delays, hesitations, and accounts (Davidson 1984; Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm 2006; Ten Have 1999; Pomerantz 1984).

Due to the spatial and temporal separation of interactants on studiVZ, “delay” cannot be observed in the same way as in verbal interactions. However, instances of “intra-silences” expressed by a series of dots were found in several data segments within this study, as well as within data from chats examined by Golato and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006). Within some examples in this data corpus, this form of a “written” pause was found to visually delay the production of dispreferred actions; however, it was also found before actions that were not dispreferred (see Example (i), lines 5 and 7). Therefore, the use of a series of dots (e.g. ...) before or after a sentence in a comment cannot always be taken to indicate a dispreferred action.

Interactants design their comments to show whether they are doing a preferred or dispreferred action, and thus there is an association between an action’s preference status and the chosen turn design. In the following sections, I will be investigating to what extent the use of the modal particle *ja* affects the production and preference status of first pair parts and second pair parts by analyzing a comment’s specific design and construction, the context within it occurs, and its content.

In order to conduct empirical research on the properties and organization of interactions, conversation analysis insists on the use of naturally occurring occasions of everyday interaction. In this study, the analyzed interactions occurred naturally and unelicited by native speakers of the German language within the studiVZ social networking community. By using this approach to data collection, this study differs from the majority of previous work on modal particles, which focused on single utterances as the isolated products of individuals having particular goals or communicative intents, rather than on the socially organized features of talk in context (Heritage & Atkinson 1984, p. 5).

## 5. Assessments

As noted above, the lexical item *ja* within the ‘middle field’ of a sentence was located in 72 interactions. Within these interactions, *ja* occurs in a variety of speech

events. However, for this particular study, I focused on the occurrence of *ja* in assessments.

Past research has shown that in German, the preference organization for general assessments is the same as in English (Auer & Uhmann 1982). However, the occurrence of the modal particle *ja* in assessments has not previously been examined using a conversation analytic approach. In this study, the term “assessment” is to be understood as a statement expressing evaluation or judgment of a referent. An assessment contains an adjective, adverb or positively/negatively laden noun which conveys the commenter’s positive or negative attitude towards a referent. As noted by Pomerantz (1984), there exists a connection between a speaker’s production of an assessment and a speaker’s presumed access to, and knowledge of, the assessed referent; if the speaker does not have access to, or sufficient knowledge of, the particular referent in question, then an assessment cannot be produced (Pomerantz 1984, p. 57). Thus, in order for the co-participant to know what the assessor is referring to, and for the co-participant to subsequently respond to the assessment appropriately, both the speaker and co-participant must have common knowledge and equal access to the referent (Golato 2005, p. 29). Within the data corpus examined in this study, the commenter either mentions the referent in the assessment, or the referent is clearly established in previous talk or through visual means (i.e. the assessment is posted under a picture). When considering the role of *ja* in the collected data samples, it is important to note the common knowledge of the referent that both the initial commenter and co-participant possess as shown through their ability to produce and respond to assessments.

In order to fully understand the definition of the term “assessment” in this study, one must consider what type of “action” is accomplished by the production of an assessment. Referring to previous studies by Schegloff (2007), “actions” are completed through turn-constructive units (TCUs), which compose a sequence of talk.<sup>14</sup> “Actions” include asking, answering, disagreeing, agreeing, offering, requesting, noticing, announcing, inviting, and so forth. However, a single TCU “can embody more than one action, and, indeed, some actions which a TCU implements are the vehicle by

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<sup>14</sup> As noted in section 3, a single comment posted on a studiVZ bulletin board may contain several independent TCUs functioning as parts of different conversations.

which other actions are implemented” (Schegloff 2007, p. 9). In the literature on modal particles, it is claimed that their function consists in implicitly accommodating the speech act of the sentence they occur in. Put differently, modal particles affect a particular speech act by evoking a different speech situation in which that speech act is also applicable (Waltereit 2001). Thus, while noting that *ja* occurs in assessments, one must also investigate the “actions” that the assessments perform in order to fully describe the interactional role of the modal particle *ja*.

After first collecting interactions in which *ja* appears in the ‘middle field’ of a sentence, I then located all occurrences of assessments (with and without *ja*) within the data corpus. I found a total of 55 (of 72) interactions containing assessments. Within those interactions, I found approximately 60 assessments lacking the particle *ja* and 27 assessments in which *ja* is present. Through further analysis, I discovered that in this data collection, the modal particle *ja* occurs in both first pair part and second pair part assessments. Implementing conversation analytic methodology, I examined each assessment containing *ja* in order to determine the function it performed, and thus to investigate the interactional environment of the modal particle *ja*. It is important to note that I based my conclusions on the evidence presented *in the data*; thus, the collected samples served not only as the data underlying the analysis, but also as evidence for my hypotheses and conclusions (Schiffrin 1994; Heritage 1984, p. 243). In order to analyze the context in which an assessment with *ja* occurs, I will consider comments made before the production of the assessment, as well as responses provided by recipients of those assessments (where available). In the following sections, I will present my examination of the production of first pair part and second pair part assessments containing *ja* in order to provide a description of the interactional environment in which the modal particle *ja* occurs.

### 5.1 First Pair Part Assessments Containing *ja*

In this data corpus, I found examples of first pair parts containing *ja* which are either self-deprecations, co-participant criticisms accomplished through a negative assessment, or noticings and thank-yous accomplished through positive assessments.

### a.) Self-deprecations

As a first pair part assessment, a self-deprecation expresses a commenter's negative evaluation of him- or herself, or of an action performed by him- or herself. In everyday verbal conversation, co-participants typically disagree with self-deprecations (Pomerantz 1984) and respond with a positive assessment (i.e. compliment). Thus, commenters that produce self-deprecations can be said to be "fishing for compliments" (Golato 2005, p. 47). In this data set, I found two assessments containing the modal particle *ja* which have similar features of self-criticisms produced in spoken interactions. Both self-deprecations in this data corpus were posted under a picture of the person leaving the comment, with the picture appearing in a photo album on someone else's profile. As photo commentary, these comments are *not* addressed to a specific person; they are simply a form of commentary available to anyone who views that particular picture. Thus, anyone who views the photo will also view the self-critical assessment and have the option of providing a second pair part.

The following example refers to a picture of three boys in a science classroom (made clear by the fact that the boys are wearing lab coats and sitting next to microscopes and beakers). All three boys are looking away from the camera and towards the front of the classroom, and none of the boys are smiling. The self-critical assessment is the first comment posted under the picture, and the commenter is one of the boys in the picture.

#### Example (1) Boys in science class<sup>15</sup>

- 1 Sam: boh junge was gehtn bei mir? seh **ja** aus wie sonen affe :D!!! schon fast so wie  
           *huh boy what goes with me? Look mp sp like so+a monkey [se]!!! yet almost so like*  
           *Wow what am I doing? I look like a monkey [se]!!! Almost like*  
           Victor der homo(zygot) ;)  
           *[name] the homo(zygote) [wse]*

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 1 for a complete explanation of the transcript notation used in this study

**mp** = modal particle  
 sp = separable prefix  
 [se] = smile emoticon  
 [wse] = wink-smile emoticon  
 rf = reflexive pronoun

*[name] the homo(zygote)[wse]*

2 Gary: NEIN!!! du konzentrierst dich einfach nur auf den Unterricht:-)

*No!!! you concentrate rp simply only on the lesson [se]*

*No!!! You are simply concentrating on the lecture [se]*

Sam first poses a hypothetical question about the reason why he appears the way he does in the picture. This question serves as a disclaimer and establishes that he did not purposely try to appear in that particular manner. Then, he compares his appearance to a monkey, and follows this self-criticism with a smile-emoticon, which marks the assessment as humorous. As found by Golato and Talegahni-Nikazm (2006), participants in web chats used smile-emoticons as a form of mitigation when performing a dispreferred action (Golato & Talegahni-Nikazm 2006, p. 317). Since self-deprecations can be seen as dispreferred actions, the usage of an emoticon in this context adheres to these findings, suggesting that the emoticon in this example serves to mitigate the production of a dispreferred self-deprecation. Sam completes his post with a comparison of himself to another person in the picture (i.e. Victor). At the same time, Sam refers to Victor as a “homo” (i.e. homosexual). However, this remark is also denoted as comical with the use of a wink-smile emoticon and the addition of *(zygot)*, which turns the “insult” of Victor into a reference to the science class that the boys are taking.

In Gary’s response, we see that Sam’s assessment was in fact taken as a self-deprecation. First, Gary provides the preferred response of disagreeing with the self-deprecation (Pomerantz 1984; Schegloff 2007). However, instead of producing a positive second assessment, which is typically how disagreement with a self-deprecation is expressed, Gary answers Sam’s question (i.e. what am I doing?), thus providing a justification for Sam’s “monkey-like” appearance. In conclusion, Gary embeds a smile-emoticon. The use of this emoticon as part of a preferred action also aligns with the findings by Golato and Talegahni-Nikazm (2006).

In the above example, *ja* occurs in a self-critical assessment, which is also an exclamatory statement. Referring to previous studies on particles by Weydt (1983) and Helbig (1988), this particular example seems to conform to the description of *ja* in

exclamatory statements used to express “astonishment and surprise.”<sup>16</sup> In this example, Sam is astonished by the fact that he looks like a monkey. It is reasonable that he would not expect to look like a monkey, but I suggest that he was not only exclaiming his astonishment at his appearance, but also providing a justification for why he appears in a non-flattering manner. With a hypothetical question followed by an exclamatory negative assessment, Sam reveals to the viewer of the photograph that he had not intended to appear the way he does in the photo, and thus his remarks serve to excuse his “monkey-like” appearance.

A similar example where *ja* occurs simultaneously in a self-deprecation and justification is as follows:

#### Example (2) Three drinking boys

1 Friedrich: man kann **ja** nich immer gut aussehen woa....^^

*one can mp not always good look right....[ese]*

*One can not always look good right?.... [ese]<sup>17</sup>*

In this example, Friedrich was the first and only commenter to post under a picture of himself and two other boys posing with bottles of beer in their hands. From the boys’ facial expressions and body positioning, it appears as though they are inebriated. In contrast to Example (1), there is no second pair part available for examination. However, when considering the context in which this comment was posted, one can see that Friedrich was negatively assessing his appearance in the picture while at the same time providing an account for it (i.e. that one can’t always look good).

In this instance, *ja* occurs in a declarative sentence followed by a series of dots and an emoticon. The four dots at the end of Friedrich’s post serve as a written pause that visually delays the realization of the emoticon, which in this case is an eyebrow-smile emoticon (a contraction of the smile emoticon that depicts only “raised eyebrows”). The concluding pause and positive emoticon are further evidence that Friedrich may be performing a dispreferred first pair part (Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm 2006). As in

<sup>16</sup> Drück ein Staunen und eine Überraschung des Sprechers über einen als außergewöhnlich empfundenen Sachverhalt aus, den er gerade erst bemerkt bzw. erkannt hat, der vom normalen Fall und der gegenteiligen Erwartung abweicht (Helbig 1988, p. 167).

<sup>17</sup> [ese] = eyebrow-smile emoticon



Example (1), the emoticon seems to be used as a mitigative strategy which “softens” the act of performing a dispreferred action. Furthermore, when considering the claim by Weydt (1983) that a declarative sentence with *ja* is often “friendlier” than one without it, the modal particle *ja* used in conjunction with emoticons seems to have a mitigating function.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, Weydt asserts that the modal particle *ja* often occurs in sentences that give a reasoning (i.e. justification), particularly when the speaker considers the reason to be obvious. In this example, Friedrich may assume it is obvious that he doesn’t look good in the picture, and he therefore provides a reason for why he looks bad with the production of a self-critical assessment containing *ja*.

Waltereit (2001) suggests that the modal particle *ja* can serve the communicative purpose of justifying a speech act in a respective situation, namely when an interactant performs a speech act that is not sufficiently licensed by the speech situation or that may have undesired side-effects (i.e. dispreferred action). He writes that, “if they nevertheless want to perform the act and if they want to avoid undesired consequences, they must somehow justify it,” which can be done implicitly through the use of the modal particle *ja* (Waltereit 2001, p. 1399). In these examples, the modal particle *ja* may function to justify the dispreferred act of self-criticism, but it may also function within the entire comment to account for the negative appearance of each boy, respectively. These examples show *ja* performing both a mitigating function while providing justification within the specific environment of a self-deprecation, which is a dispreferred action. Thus, data found in this particular context seems to align with previous claims by both Weydt (1983) and Waltereit (2001) about the modal particle *ja*.

#### b.) Negative Assessments

The following three data segments and subsequent analyses examine first pair part negative assessments containing the modal particle *ja*. The first two examples are co-participant criticisms, in which an initial commenter produces a negative evaluation of a co-participant. The discussion that follows will show how elements such as emoticons

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<sup>18</sup> Man versucht mit *ja* eine Übereinstimmung herzustellen. Deshalb wirken Sätze mit *ja* oft freundlicher als solche ohne *ja* (Weydt et al. 1983, p. 66).

and the modal particle *ja* provide the message with a sarcastic tone, and thus establish the negative assessment as part of a joke. By performing a negative assessment of a co-participant (which is a dispreferred action) in the form of a joke, the effect of the negative assessment is mitigated and social solidarity can be preserved. In these examples, we see common features such as the modal particle *ja* and positive-emotion emoticons working together as part of a negative assessment presented as a joke. Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that these features are related to preserving solidarity, as seen in the following data segment:

### Example (3) Riding on a bus

1 Jennifer: ich persönlich finde den gesichtsausdruck **ja** toller als das shirt :P

*I personally find the facial expression mp cooler than the shirt [te]*

*I personally think the facial expression is more awesome than the shirt [te]<sup>19</sup>*

2 Friedrich: von dem soll ja auch das t-shirt ablenken:P

*from it should mp mp the t-shirt distract [te]*

*The t-shirt should distract you from my facial expression [te]*

3 Jennifer: klappt nur leider nicht :P

*Works only unfortunately not [te]*

*Doesn't work unfortunately [te]*

Jennifer posted the first comment under a picture of Friedrich riding on a bus. The picture reveals only the torso and head of Friedrich, who is looking away from the camera and not smiling. In line 1, Jennifer compares Friedrich's facial expression to his shirt and then gives her opinion that Friedrich's facial expression is in some way "better" than the t-shirt he is wearing. Although seeming like a compliment, this positive assessment is really being used as an ironic way to insult Friedrich's facial expression. Note that Jennifer's positive assessment of the shirt contains the modal particle *ja*, yet the entire comment is meant as a negative assessment of Friedrich's countenance. Another interesting feature of this comment is that the assessment containing *ja* is followed by an emoticon, specifically a tongue-sticking-out one. Therefore, I propose that the use of the tongue-sticking-out emoticon coupled with the modal particle *ja* reveals that this negative

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<sup>19</sup> [te] = tongue-sticking-out emoticon

assessment is made in jest. Friedrich's response in line 2 reveals that Jennifer's remark was received as a joke; he does not defend himself or disagree with Jennifer's evaluation, but rather he continues the interaction by producing a justification (revealing partial agreement) and a tongue-sticking-out emoticon. It appears that Friedrich was hoping that viewers of the picture would notice his shirt instead of his facial expression, revealing that he finds his own facial expression worthy of mockery. In line 3, the joke is concluded when Jennifer informs Friedrich that his t-shirt unfortunately didn't draw attention away from his facial expression as he had hoped; she then produces a final tongue-sticking-out emoticon.

Previous studies that investigated the production of sarcasm through emoticons have focused primarily on the wink-smile emoticon (Walther & D'Addario 2001).<sup>20</sup> A study by Jennifer Leigh Dickens describes the tongue-sticking-out emoticon with the emotional word "amusement" (Dickens 2003). However, this study surveyed mostly members of the Hispanic-American community by means of a questionnaire on the relationship between emoticons and specific emotional meanings. Golato and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) found in their study of online chats that when emoticons are "embedded in a preferred action, such as making an assessment or agreeing with an assessment, smiley faces and emoticons may be interpreted as strategies to express and intensify friendliness towards the co-participant" (Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm 2006, p. 317). Therefore, I propose that the same tongue-sticking-out emoticon is used throughout this entire interaction in order to mitigate any dispreferred actions and maintain friendliness throughout the joke (which both participants take part in). This is an important observation, specifically considering that the participants in this conversation lack access to facial expression and bodily gesture which normally provide information about the seriousness or humorous nature of a statement in a face-to-face interaction. Through analysis of this particular conversation's context, we see that the above data segment serves as an example of the indication of sarcasm through the tongue-sticking-out emoticon.

According to previous studies on modal particles, *ja* can only be used to express "astonishment and surprise" when it occurs in an exclamatory sentence. However, in the

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix 1 for examples of wink-smile emoticons

assessment in line 1, *ja* occurs in a declarative sentence showing a contradiction to a shared expectation; it was expected that the shirt would be the focus of picture rather than Friedrich's facial expression, but Jennifer comments on the facial expression instead, using this opportunity to tease Friedrich about his appearance in the picture. Thus, *ja* seems to occur in a declarative remark which acknowledges a discrepancy from the expected behavior. König (1997) postulated that the modal particle *ja* within assertions (such as in the example above) indicates the strength of existing assumptions. Put differently, with the usage of *ja*, the commenter reveals his or her assumption that "strong evidence of the propositional content of the utterance is available in the situation," either through prior knowledge or perceptually (König 1997, p. 70; Waltereit 2001, p. 1398). In the example presented above, both participants have visual access to the image that is being discussed. Furthermore, Friedrich's lack of disagreement with Jennifer's assertion reveals that he did not find her proposition to be false, and that he actually agrees with her "assumption" (i.e. that there is strong evidence in the picture to suggest his facial expression is more amusing than his shirt). Additionally, in conjunction with the emoticon, the modal particle *ja* is acting to mitigate the dispreferred action of criticizing while contributing to the interpretation of the negative remark as a joke.

The next example displays another negative assessment of a co-participant's appearance accomplished in a jesting way.

#### Example (4) Haircut

- 1 Phil: nene..wo ist den der liebe kleine Adam geblieben :)...siehst **ja** jetzt aus wie ein  
*nah .. where is then the dear small [name] stayed [se]... looks mp now sp like a*  
*Nah, where is the dear little [name] [se]... you look like a*  
 knastbruder...  
*jailbird ...*  
*jailbird now...*
- 2 ;-) lg  
*[wse]dear regards*  
*[wse] best wishes*
- 3 Adam: Daher kommt ja auch der Haarschnitt. . . Das war  
*Therefore comes mp mp the haircut . . . that was*

That is why I got a haircut . . . that was  
 4 ne harte Zeit aue. . . :-)  
 a hard time ouch . . . [se]  
 a hard time ouch . . . [se]

The comment in lines 1 and 2 was posted by Phil on Adam's profile wall. As described in section 3, each member of studiVZ may upload a profile picture which is displayed in the left-hand corner of his or her profile. In this example, Phil is criticizing the appearance of Adam in his profile picture. Line 1 begins with a token followed by two dots, both of which serve as a delay strategy. As a second delay device, Phil poses a question. This question also provides a positive assessment of the co-participant and reveals Phil's preference for Adam's former appearance (i.e. Adam appears differently in this picture than he normally does). After a smile emoticon and another written pause in the form of a series of dots, Phil negatively assesses Adam, comparing his appearance to that of a 'jailbird.' Phil concludes with a wink-smile emoticon and a typical, positive farewell, which suggests that he is just teasing Adam about his appearance. The structure of Phil's comment is similar to findings by Golato (2005) and Pomerantz (1984) for verbal interactions. They suggest that in spoken conversation, the dispreferred act of criticizing the co-participant usually occurs in the form of favorable assessment plus critical assessment (Golato 2005, p. 96; Pomerantz 1984, p. 80). In the example above, Phil's criticism of Adam's appearance is softened, qualified, and mitigated by a preceding positive remark, as well as delayed through written pauses and emoticons.

In lines 3 and 4, Adam essentially agrees with Phil's negative assessment of his appearance; Adam uses the fact that he 'looked like a jailbird' as an account for getting a haircut, and he acknowledges that 'it was a hard time.' The final smile emoticon hints that Adam did not take offense to Phil's criticism, but in fact agrees with the negative assessment. It should be noted that Adam's response to Phil's co-participant criticism containing *ja* is similar to Friedrich's response to Jennifer's criticism with *ja* in Example (3).

Also as in Example (3), the modal particle *ja* occurs in a declarative sentence acting as a co-participant criticism. In this case, the use of *ja* may once again be said to modify the propositional attitude of the commenter. Both commenters can observe

Adam's appearance in his profile picture, and Phil's use of *ja* may be conveying his confidence in his assertion, as well as his assumption that Adam will not disagree with his proposition due to evidence available in the picture.<sup>21</sup> It should also be observed that *ja* occurs along with other strategies evoked by Phil to mitigate the critical assessment. As shown through Adam's positive response, *ja* occurs in a co-participant criticism that is produced as a sarcastic remark, where Phil's facetiousness may be being conveyed through the use of emoticons and delay devices, as well as the use of the modal particle *ja*. One should also notice that this particular sentence structure (i.e. sehen *ja* aus wie) occurred in Example (1) in the form of a self-deprecation, which is also a form of dispreferred negative assessment.

In this final example of a negative assessment containing *ja*, the negative evaluation is not a criticism of the co-participant's appearance as in the previous two examples. Rather, this comment negatively assesses the entire picture in order to criticize the co-participant for posting the picture.

#### Example (5) Not looking at camera

1 Lucy: Ey, did Bild jeht **ja** wohl gar nich...Ich glaub bei dir hackt et ganz schön!!!

*Ey, the picture goes mp mp even not ... I believe by you hack it quite good!!!*

*Ey, this picture is a no-go... I think there is something loose!!!*

2 Sara: hähä..ik find dit lustig \*g\*

*haha.. I find this funny [ffse]*

*haha.. I find it funny [ffse]<sup>22</sup>*

The picture referenced in these comments is one of Lucy looking away from the camera and appearing rather unaware that the picture is being taken. Sara posted the picture in an album on her studiVZ profile, and Lucy produced a negative evaluation of the entire picture, which begins with a token followed by a negative assessment containing *ja*. This remark lets Sara know that Lucy does not hold a positive view of the picture. However, we also see that after a series of dots representing a written pause,

<sup>21</sup> Jacobs (1991) claimed that by using the modal particle *ja*, a speaker expresses his or her belief that the addressee neither believes that the proposition is false nor considers the possibility of falseness in the given situation (Jacobs 1991, p. 146).

<sup>22</sup> [ffse] = front-facing-smile emoticon

Lucy asserts that there must be something wrong with Sara since she posted such a picture in an album. Since Lucy is not looking at the camera or posing in a flattering way in the picture, this negative remark of the picture itself can be considered to reveal Lucy's embarrassment of her appearance in the photo. Rather than attempting to justify her appearance in the picture through a self-deprecation (as seen in previous examples), Lucy criticizes Sara for being the source of this embarrassment. In line 1, there is a lack of emoticons, showing that there is no attempt being made to save face and preserve social solidarity. In line 2, Sara first produces a written form of a chuckle before confirming that she in fact finds the picture funny (instead of embarrassing). Thus, Sara disagrees with Lucy's assessment that 'the picture is a no-go,' and her response may be providing an account for posting the picture, since having a positive opinion of the picture would justify posting it. Sara does not respond to the co-participant criticism (i.e. that she has something 'loose'), but rather she concludes the post with a front-facing-smile emoticon expressing a positive emotion. Sara shows that she and Lucy differ on whether the picture is funny or not. At the same time, she seems to realize that Lucy is upset at the fact that the picture was posted, and thus the emoticon in line 2 serves as an attempt to express friendliness towards the co-participant and reestablish social solidarity.

In this example, *ja* occurs in a declarative sentence as the first in a series of modal particles, all of which precede *nicht* 'not' (showing negation). Thus, we must consider *ja* in conjunction with the particles *wohl* 'well' and *gar* 'even,' which are between *ja* and the negator *nicht*. Weydt claims that the modal particle *ja* in conjunction with *wohl* can be used to make a speculation or assumption. Weydt writes that when a speaker considers something to be very probable or practically self-evident, then this supposition is often expressed through *ja wohl*.<sup>23</sup> In Example (5), it seems as though Lucy thinks the embarrassing nature of the picture is self-evident. Also, Lucy makes an assumption about how Sara views the picture, and she speculates that because Sara doesn't seem to hold the same (self-evident) view as her, then she must have something 'loose' in her head. Thus, the combination of *ja wohl* in this particular context seems to convey the meaning described by Weydt (Weydt et al. 1983, p. 42). Also, Weydt asserts that when

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<sup>23</sup> Manchmal halt der Sprecher etwas nicht nur für wahrscheinlich, sondern für sehr wahrscheinlich oder für fast selbstverständlich. Dann kann er statt *wohl* auch *ja wohl* sagen (Weydt et al. 1983, p. 42).

the (accented) modal particle *ja* occurs in an imperative sentence, it serves to warn of danger or admonish, as well as to express a threat, although it depends on the situation.<sup>24</sup> In this particular example, the negative assessment in which *ja* occurs seems to be threateningly reproaching the co-participant for posting the picture on studiVZ. However, *ja* does not occur in an imperative sentence as proposed by Weydt, but rather in a declarative negative assessment.

In the above examples of negative assessments containing *ja*, we see that *ja* occurs in conjunction with emoticons and written pauses within co-participant criticisms. These common features of the above negative assessments contribute to performing the act of criticism, either earnestly or in jest, while maintaining social solidarity between the co-participants.

### c). Positive Assessments

I found a total of seven positive assessments with *ja* in the first pair part position. In her study of compliments, Golato observed that compliments, which are often accomplished through positive assessments, may constitute a noticing (Golato 2005, p. 124). Of the collected samples related to this section, five of the seven occur as noticings that call attention to an item or situation by positively assessing a referent. Overall, noticings (i.e. observations) have been found to be preferred over announcements (Schegloff 1995). A positive assessment in the first pair part position conveniently announces that an item has caught the speaker's attention while also immediately conveying the speaker's positive stance towards the noticed item. Thus, the production of a first position positive assessment is more preferred than making an announcement, and within this data corpus, the modal particle *ja* has been found to occur in these preferred positive evaluations.

The following two positive assessments occur at the beginning of a conversation. However, second pair parts to these two assessments are unavailable for analysis since co-participants did not respond to the assessments in subsequent posts.

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<sup>24</sup> Mit diesen betonten Formen können [*ja*, *bloß*, und *nur*] vor einer Gefahr warnen oder mit einer Strafe drohen. Ob *ja*, *bloß*, und *nur* eine Warnung oder eine Drohung ausdrücken, hängt von der Situation ab (Weydt et al. 1983, p. 59).



### Example (6) Fussballfan

1 Susanne: du siehst **ja** auch wie ein echter

*You look **mp** mp like a genuine*

*You look like a genuine*

2 Fussballfan:DD

*soccer+fan [se]*

*soccer fan [se]*

### Example (7) Cake

1 Cory: Na das sieht **ja** mal lecker aus!!! Hoffe es hat genauso gut geschmeckt wie es

*hey that looks **mp** mp delicious sp !!! hope it has as good tasted as it*

*hey that looks delicious!!! Hope it tasted as good as it*

*ausschaut!! ;)*

*look !! [wse]*

*looks !! [wse]*

By positively evaluating the co-participant and the cake, the commenters display that they have “noticed” something in the picture, and that they have a positive opinion of the referent. As mentioned above, photos can be posted within albums on a user’s profile, and any viewer of the album can post a comment. As a result, the mere posting of a picture can be seen as eliciting an assessment, so it is not surprising that many assessments found in this data corpus reference pictures.

The assessment discussed below in Example (8) was also not responded to by a co-participant, but it occurs in the middle of a profile wall posting, as well as in the middle of an on-going conversation (in contrast to the conversation-starting assessments that were part of photo commentary discussed above). The commenter brings up previously discussed aspects of the on-going conversation through a positive assessment, and in this way the assessment also serves as a noticing. In the following example, “*sonstwas*” *machen* ‘doing something else’ refers to comments made by the co-

participant about having free time to play games on the internet, to listen to music, and to sleep, as opposed to working all day as the commenter must do.<sup>25</sup>

#### Example (8) Internet and sleep

- 1 Paulo: ja wenn ich mal was mehr zeit hab guck ich mir das mal gerne an :)  
*yes when I once what more time have look I to+me that once gladly at [se]*  
*yea when I have some more time I will gladly check it out [se]*
- 2 jaja "sonstwas" machen, hört sich **ja** nett an :P  
*yes+yes "something+else" do, sounds rf **mp** nice sp [te]*  
*yea to do "something else" sounds nice [te]*
- 3 ich liebe auch schlaf und besonders viel schlaf  
*I love also sleep and especially much sleep*  
*I also love sleep and especially a lot of sleep*
- 4 aber manchmal haut das manchmal nicht hin :(  
*But sometimes work that sometimes not sp [fe]*  
*But that sometimes does not work out well [fe]<sup>26</sup>*

Golato notes that German compliments show a lack of first person pronouns (i.e. *ich* 'I' and *wir* 'we'). Furthermore, compliments in German seem to be remarkably "referential" in their design rather than "personal," with maximal emphasis on the assessable rather than on the speaker's own likes and dislikes (Golato 2005, p. 82). The examples of first pair part positive assessments discussed in this section also seem to be designed in this way. Examples (6) through (8) place a focus on the referent through the verb choice in the positive assessment (i.e. *aussehen* 'appear', *anhören* 'to sound'). Even though general assessments in spoken German conversations often contain structures with the first person (singular and plural) and have been found to regularly contain the construction *Ich finde...* 'I find...' (Golato 2005, p. 218), the above positive assessments are structured more like the compliments examined by Golato (2005), with the referent as the subject of the evaluative sentence rather than the commenter. In this way, the three positive assessments presented above are designed to emphasize a positive attribute of the referent in order to reveal the commenter's positive opinion of that referent.

<sup>25</sup> The entire conversation can be found in Appendix 2

<sup>26</sup> [fe] = frown emoticon

Furthermore, in all of the examples above, the modal particle *ja* occurs in a declarative sentence either directly after the conjugated verb or after a reflexive pronoun which follows the conjugated verb. The particle *ja* either precedes the evaluative adjective or another modal particle which directly precedes the positive descriptor. In these instances, *ja* may function to emphasize the adjective, or to merely enforce the friendliness and positiveness of the remark, as all of the assessments express affiliation and are accompanied by positive-emotion emoticons.

Example (9) was posted under a picture of two guinea pigs in their cage. The first sentence in the first comment posted under the photo is an assessment containing *ja*. However, unlike the previous three examples, in Example (9) a second pair part assessment expressing the same evaluation as the first assessment is produced in line 2.

#### Example (9) Guinea Pigs

- 1 Karen: die sind **ja** süüüüß! Muss sie mir dann mal live angucken kommen...  
*They are mp sweet ! must they to+me then once live look+at come ...*  
*They are sweet! I must see them live in person...*
- 2 Jessica: oh mein gott sind die putzig...und diese salatkugel ist ja der knaller...  
*Oh my God are they cute ... and this salad+sphere is mp the banger...*  
*Oh my God they are cute... and this salad sphere<sup>27</sup> is the coolest...*

Karen's assessment shows that she notices the guinea pigs and thinks they are sweet. In Jessica's response to the first assessment, she produces a second positive evaluation of the guinea pigs, showing that she also notices the guinea pigs and agrees with Karen's positive assessment.<sup>28</sup> In the first pair part assessment with *ja* in line 1, we see the same emphasis on the referent through verb choice (i.e. *sein* 'to be') as in the previously discussed examples

In addition to the examples above, Example (10) below also serves as a noticing. Just as in Example (9), a co-participant responds to the assessment containing *ja* with a

<sup>27</sup> *salatkugel* refers to a spherical container containing salad which is used as a feeding device for the guinea pigs

<sup>28</sup> See section 5.2 (c), Example (24) for analysis of the second pair part assessment in line 2 that contains the modal particle *ja*.

second assessment showing agreement.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, the syntactical environment of the modal particle *ja* in the positive assessments that were responded to by co-participants is the same as in previously discussed examples which were not responded to, with *ja* occurring after the conjugated verb and before the positive descriptor.

#### Example (10) Skeptical of sea creature

- 1 Nina: haha, das Bild ist **ja** lustig :-) Mit zwei Sieben in der Hand \*g\* Ich gucke ja sehr  
*haha the picture is mp funny [se] with two filters in the hand [ffse] I look mp very*  
*haha this picture is funny [se] with two filters in my hand [ffse] I am looking very*
- 2 kritisch, aber was hält der mir denn auch da vor die Nase?  
*skeptical, but what hold he me then also there before the nose?*  
*skeptical, but what is he holding in front of my nose?*
- 3 Stan: das war ja auch voll der vogel der kerl:D  
*That was mp mp full the bird the fellow[se]*  
*That was good, that odd character, that fellow[se]*

Due to the fact that Example (10) has a similar structure and situational context as the other examples discussed within this section, we can postulate that *ja* is serving a analogous function within this assessment.

It is important to note that previously mentioned studies by König (1997) may also apply to the above examples of positive assessments, as the content of their comments is available within the situation, either as a picture (in Examples (6), (7), (9), (10)) or common knowledge (in Example (8)). These commenters are asserting their opinions, and it is possible that *ja* is used to reinforce the commenters' confidence in the fact that co-participants will share that opinion. Waltereit (2001) writes that "when the speaker assumes that there is strong evidence for the propositional content available in the situation, she also implies that speaker and addressee agree as to the propositional content of the utterance" (Waltereit 2001, p. 1398). Thus, Karen and Jessica assume that others will find the guinea pigs to be cute; Cory believes others will think the cake looks delicious; Paulo suspects that his co-participant will also think "doing something else" sounds nice; And Nina assumes others will find the photo funny. Similarly, Lindner

<sup>29</sup> For analysis of the second pair part assessment with *ja* in this example, see section 5.2(c), Example (23)

(1991) claims that the modal particle *ja* indicates “that the state of affairs in question is not controversial” (p. 171), which we see to be the case in the above examples as shown through agreeing responses or a lack of response. Therefore, it is possible that *ja* functions within these noticings to signal that the commenters assume their positive opinion of the referent will be held by others, and therefore agreement should be produced if co-participants choose to respond. Indeed, we see that the only two assessments with *ja* in this section that were responded to by co-participants were in fact agreed with, while the other first pair part assessments functioning as noticings were not responded to in subsequent posts.

As noted in previous literature, compliments regularly look like positive assessments (Golato 2005, p. 87). Studies of both German and English data have found that compliments are frequently used together with expressions of thanks or even in place of them (Golato 2005, p. 113). In the present data, I found two examples of *ja* in a compliment expressing gratitude.

Example (11) is a multi-party conversation occurring over a period of less than 24 hours. As Rita announces to Jamie and Kim that she has once again begun to use studiVZ after an absence from the virtual community, the recipients of the news precede to celebrate her return to the network. In this example, it is important to remember that when a comment is posted on a user’s wall, that comment is visible to anyone who looks at the user’s profile; we see from the responses in the following example that all three participants were viewing each other’s profiles and responding to remarks that were posted on their own profile (i.e. addressed specifically to them), as well as to remarks posted on the other participants’ profiles. Below, the comments are arranged chronologically with the commenter whose profile the post appeared on listed in parentheses.

#### Example (11) Return to studiVZ

1 Rita (to Jamie): Bin wieder da ... vorerst nur halb-offiziell :)

*am again here ... at+the+moment only half-official [se]*

*I’m back ... at the moment only half-officially [se]*

2 Kim (to Rita): uuuhhhh..

*uh*

- uh*
- 3 die Rita, sie ist wieder da!!!! :)  
*the [name], she is again here!!!! [se]*  
*[name], she is here again!!!! [se]*
- 4 \*anspringundknuddelundumschmeiß\*  
*\*jump +and+ hug +and+ to knock over\**  
*\*jump and hug to the point of knocking over\**
- 5 Rita (to Kim): Yessss, I'm back! XD  
*Yes, I'm back! [se]*  
*Yes, I'm back! [se]*
- 6 Kim (to Rita): ach, was ich noch sagen wollte:  
*Oh, what I still say wanted:*  
*Oh, I wanted to say:*
- 7 \*drück\*  
*\*squeeze\**  
*\*squeeze\**
- 8 \*knutsch\*  
*\*smooch\**  
*\*smooch\**
- 9 Riiiiitttttaaaaa!!! :)  
*[name]!!! [se]*  
*[name]!!! [se]*
- 10 Jamie (to Rita): Ooooooh, mein Rita!! Träume werden doch noch  
*Oh, my [name]!! Dreams become mp still*  
*Oh, my [name]!! Dreams do come*
- 11 wahr ;-)  
*true [wse]*  
*true [wse]*
- 12 Willst du morgen zum Indonesier mitkommen? Bitte  
*Want you tomorrow to Indonesia come+along? Request*  
*Do you want to come along tomorrow to Indonesia? I request*
- 13 um Antwort!! :-D  
*for answer !! [se]*  
*an answer !! [se]*
- 14 Jamie (to Kim): Freust du dich auch so, dass R. wieder da ist??? :-D

- Be+glad you rf also so, that [name]again here is??? [se]*  
*Aren't you also glad that [name] is here again??? [se]*
- 15 Kim (to Jamie): ach.. nur ein ganz kleines bisschen.. ;)  
*Oh .. only a very small bit .. [wse]*  
*Oh.. only a very little bit .. [wse]*
- 16 \*luftsprüngemach\*  
*\*air+jump+do\**  
*\*jump in the air\**
- 17 Rita (to Jamie): Ihr zwei seid **ja** niedlich :)  
*You two are **mp** cute [se]*  
*You two are cute [se]*
- 18 Indonesier klingt spannend! Wann, wo, mit wem und  
*Indonesia sounds exciting! When, where, with whom and*  
*Indonesia sounds exciting! When, where, with whom and*
- 19 -ganz wichtig!- grober Kostenpunkt?  
*- very important!- rough cost+point?*  
*- very importantly- rough estimate of the cost?*

After Rita informs each co-participant of her return to the studiVZ community, Jamie and Kim produce winking and smiling emoticons, as well as descriptions of actions such as hugging, smooching, jumping for joy, etc. in order to express their admiration of Rita and their elation that she is once again using studiVZ. In lines 9, 10, and 14, Jamie and Kim use diminutive forms of Rita's name in order to denote familiarity and endearment.<sup>30</sup> In response to the positive remarks made by the other two participants, Rita produces a positive assessment containing *ja* in line 17 (i.e. *ihr zwei seid ja niedlich* 'you two are cute'). This compliment, which is addressed to both co-participants, fulfills the function of expressing appreciation without an appreciation token (i.e. *danke* 'thank you') present.

Just as in Examples (6), (7), and (8) above, the positive assessment containing *ja* is not responded to by either of the co-participants in subsequent posts. The modal particle *ja* once again occurs directly after the conjugated verb and before the describing

<sup>30</sup> In order to respect the privacy of the participants, their names have been changed. Therefore, the diminutive forms of names have also been changed in the transcription.

adjective, and the positive assessment is again accompanied by an emoticon showing positive emotion. Thus, the modal particle *ja* occurring in a compliment that shows appreciation has an interactional environment similar to when it occurs in first pair part positive assessments proffered as noticings (as discussed in Examples (6) through (10)).

The following data segment is another example of a positive assessment containing *ja* which functions as a thank-you.

Example (12) Thanks for the song

1 Marie: Huhu Süße!

*[greeting] sweetie!*

*[greeting] sweetie!*

2 Du bist ein Schatz und **ja** soooo süß! Ist das

*You are a treasure and **mp** so sweet! Is that*

*You are a treasure and so sweet! That song is*

3 Lied schön kitschig ;-)

*song pleasantly hokey [wse]*

*pleasantly hokey [wse]*

4 Und wie ich dich vermissen werde, aber wir sehen

*and how I you miss will , but we see*

*and how I will miss you, but we will see*

5 uns schon bald wieder- versprochen!

*Us already soon again - promise !*

*each other again soon - promise!*

6 Dicken Kuss

*Fat Kiss*

*Fat Kiss*

Many users of studiVZ interact with each other outside of the virtual world. In this example, Marie produces a positive assessment of the co-participant in line 2, and then follows the assessment with a positive assessment of a song and a wink-smile emoticon. The formatting choice by this commenter suggests a relationship between the positive assessment of the song and the compliment containing *ja*. Since the co-participant does not respond to the compliment or to the positive assessment of the song



in a successive post, it is difficult to determine how the compliment was interpreted. However, because shared knowledge of a referent is necessary for an assessment to be produced, properly understood, and responded to, we can infer that the co-participant knows what song Marie is referring to, and that the song has been discussed in a previous interaction between the participants. Furthermore, we can guess that the compliment and subsequent positive assessment in lines 2 and 3 are produced to express gratitude to the co-participant for a reason associated with the song (i.e. the co-participant shared the song with Marie). However, as the previous and successive comments in this conversation are not available for analysis, I can only speculate the appreciatory function of the compliment in this example.

In any case, the modal particle *ja* occurs after the conjugated verb and before the degree-adverb *so*, which directly precedes the describing adjective. As the previous analysis shows, *ja* occurs in a very specific syntactical environment when being used in first pair part positive assessments that function as noticings or as expressions of gratitude. Although both of these actions are preferred, producing an evaluative first pair part is generally considered to be more “risky” since the first pair part producer is making an assessment of a referent before knowing the co-participant’s opinion of the referent (Auer & Uhmann 1982, p. 16-17). However, as discussed above, the modal particle *ja* may occur within these assessments in order to show that the commenters do not think they are taking a risk by giving a positive evaluation, as they assume that co-participants are going to agree due to the “strong evidence” available in their favor. Through analysis of the above data samples, I suggest that the modal particle *ja* in this particular context also serves to emphasize the positive descriptor (i.e. adjective) and enhance the overall positiveness of the comment. As these positive assessments function as noticings or thank-yous that are either agreed with or not responded to, we can speculate that the co-participants interpreted the assessments as correct and appropriate.

## 5.2 Second Pair Part Assessments Containing *ja*

Within the collected data, I found three second pair part assessments containing *ja* which are produced in response to a yes/no question. These assessments also function as

part of dispreferred actions, such as declining an invitation, contradicting a co-participant, and disagreeing with a co-participant's view by correcting it. Additionally, I located seven second pair part assessments with *ja* which are positive responses to announcements and news deliveries, or responses to an answer of a previously asked question (i.e. third comment in the sequence). In the final section of analysis, I will discuss the five examples found with "second assessments" containing *ja* (i.e. in response to a first pair part assessment).

#### a.) Response to a Question

The following three examples contain assessments produced as part of an answer to a yes/no question. These responses to questions are in a non-conforming format (i.e. they do not include "yes" or "no," even though they show alignment or disalignment relative to the first pair part) (Schegloff 2007, p. 79).

#### Example (13) Next time

1 Adrian: Und trauste dich "das nächste mal" nochma mit uns

*And dare rf "the next time" again with us*

*And do you dare to come "the next time" with us*

2 4 nach K. :-P

*four to [place] [te]*

*four to [place] [te]*

3 Sabine: lol

*[Laugh+out+loud]*

*[Laugh out loud]*

*[Laugh out loud]*

4 mmh.... ich weiß nicht... ;)

*mmh .... I know not ... [wse]*

*mmh .... I don't know... [wse]*

5 ne, war **ja** lustig am freitag,

*no, was **mp** amusing on Friday*

*no, it was amusing on Friday*

6 hab dann noch 20 min. gepennt, dann musste ich

- have then mp 20 minutes dosed , then must I*  
*I slept after that for 20 minutes, then I had to*  
 7 schon wieder aufstehen, aber hab dann im bus  
*yet again get+up , but have then in bus*  
*get up again, but then I slept in the bus!*  
 8 gepennt! ^^  
*dosed! [ese]*  
*[ese]*  
 9 also nächstes mal bin ich wieder dabei, wenn ihr  
*therefore next time am I again present, if you+all*  
*So next time, I am there, if you all*  
 10 mich nochmal mitnehmt :)  
*me again with+take [se]*  
*take me with you again [se]*

In Example (13), Adrian poses a yes/no question. However, this question also acts to elicit an assessment from Sabine of the previous evening spent together in K. (a city in Germany). As noted above, providing the first assessment of a referent without knowing the opinion of the co-participant is risky, and in this example, Adam avoids providing the first assessment of the evening by asking Sabine if she would dare to repeat the experience; if Sabine responds with “yes,” then she must have had a positive experience. In this way, Adrian’s question also serves as an invitation to go with him and three others on a trip to the city again. The tongue-sticking-out emoticon at the end of the question gives the message a sarcastic yet positive tone. In line 3, Sabine first responds with laughter. Then, she produces the response token “mmh,” followed by a series of dots preceding an ambiguous answer to Adam’s question about whether she would dare to go to K. again. The laughter, response token, and series of dots can be thought of as delay devices, which are typically used in the production of dispreferred actions in verbal conversations. In this case, the dispreferred response is an ambiguous, partially-negative answer to Adam’s yes/no question combined with a decline to his invitation. However, the wink-smile emoticon at the end of line 4 indicates sarcasm. Indeed, we see in line 5 that Sabine begins with “ne,” which negates the previously given dispreferred response. She then proffers a positive assessment of the previous shared experience, with the modal

particle *ja* occurring in the assessment. Lines 6-8 represent a telling-sequence which is embedded into the second pair part position in a question-answer sequence (Schegloff 2007, p. 234). At the end of the post, Sabine accepts the invitation (i.e. provides the preferred response) and produces smile emoticon.

Previous studies on modal particles suggest that *ja* signals that the topic of discussion is evident (universally valid) or already known by both participants. In this way, the speaker recollects prior knowledge in order to make a present argument (Helbig 1988; Molár 2002, p. 91; Bublitz 1978). Because the production of *ja* indicates a reference to shared knowledge, it often serves to provide a reason or justification; in these cases *ja* can be substituted by a “because-sentence” (Helbig 1988, p.165).<sup>31</sup>

Example (13) provides an example of *ja* which seems to be functioning as described in these previous studies. In this case, the modal particle *ja* occurs in a (declarative) positive assessment which serves to mitigate a preceding dispreferred action while reinforcing the preferred action of accepting an invitation. Additionally, this assessment refers to a shared experience by both co-participants which Sabine positively evaluates in order to justify why she is accepting the invitation. When the assessment is substituted by a ‘because-sentence’ (i.e. *weil es am Freitag lustig war* ‘because it was amusing on Friday’), we see that it could be interpreted as a reason for accepting the invitation.

The modal particle *ja* occurs after the conjugated verb and before a positive descriptor, just as in assessments discussed in section 5.1(c). Furthermore, analysis of the interactional environment in which *ja* occurs suggests that in this example, *ja* functions to modify the propositional content of the assessment it occurs in, just as in the previously analyzed examples of section 5.1(c). So in this example, I speculate that the modal particle *ja* indicates that Sabine does not expect Adrian to disagree with her assessment because there is a shared, prior knowledge about the experience being discussed which supports her evaluation. It should be noted that the interactional environment of this particular assessment is very different than in the examples from section 5.1(c); the assessment in Example (13) is produced as part of a decline (and eventual acceptance) of an invitation embedded within an answer to a question, while the similar examples from

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<sup>31</sup> *weil-Sätze*

section 5.1(c) are produced as first pair part noticings or thank-yous. Thus, although *ja* occurs in the same syntactical environment as in examples from section 5.1(c), the assessment which contains *ja* in Example (13) does not perform the same actions as the assessments discussed in section 5.1(c).

In Example (14), *ja* occurs in an assessment which draws upon shared prior knowledge in order to make a point. The assessment in this example also functions as part of a dispreferred action (contradicting a co-participant).

#### Example (14) Orange juice

- 1 Kelli: ham wir da die wodka-deckel-pinnchen getrunken?! ^^  
*Have we there the vodka - cap - shot glass drank ?! [ese]*  
*Did we drink the vodka-cap-shot glass there?! [ese]*
- 2 Trevor: und des war lecker =)  
*and that was delicious [se]*  
*and it was delicious [se]*
- 3 deckel für deckel ....  
*cap after cap ....*  
*cap after cap ....*
- 4 Martha: sieht so aus.. obwohl du **ja** ziemlich unschuldig den osoft in der hand hältst..  
*looks so sp .. although you mp rather innocently the o+juice in the hand hold ..*  
*looks like it .. even though you are holding the orange juice rather innocently in your hand*
- 5 Kelli: ja weil ich auch das ganze wochenende nix anderes getrunken hab als  
*yes because I also the entire weekend nothing other drank have than*  
*yes because I drank nothing other than orange juice the entire weekend*  
 osoft....;D  
*o+juice[wse]*  
 ... [wse]

These comments were posted underneath a picture of Kelli, Trevor and Martha drinking at a festival. It is important to note that Kelli is holding a bottle of orange juice while the others are holding bottles of liquor or a shot-glass. As this is a multi-party conversation, the comments have been arranged in the order that they were posted under the photo on studiVZ.

In line 1, Kelli poses a yes/no question about drinking shots of vodka at the moment when the picture was taken. We know Kelli was present when the picture was taken (because she is in the picture), yet she asks a question about the photographed moment, giving the impression that she doesn't remember. The ending-punctuation choice (i.e. ?!) acts similarly to intonation in verbal conversation; although asking a question, the remark is also exclaiming and showing surprise, which happens to be expressed through punctuation when conversing through this particular medium. In lines 2 and 3, Trevor confirms that they did in fact drink vodka from the shot-glass. Although Trevor responds to Kelli's question first, Martha does not directly respond to his post within her comment in line 4, but rather she produces an aligning answer in a non-conforming format to Kelli's question. The non-conforming "yes" answer produced by Martha suggests that the answer to Kelli's question should be obvious, and therefore Kelli should have known the answer to the question. After a written pause represented by a series of dots, Martha provides an assessment of Kelli (i.e. that she is holding the orange juice bottle innocently) that contains the modal particle *ja*. This assessment is part of Martha's (preferred) response to a question, yet it also suggests to any other viewer of the picture that although Kelli is 'innocently' holding a bottle of orange juice, she is in fact guilty of drinking alcohol like the other people in the picture. In this way, the assessment has the dispreferred function of contradicting a co-participant (which the written pauses and lack of emoticons support). It is interesting to note that the comment produced above in response to a yes/no question has a similar structure to the first pair part negative assessments within Examples (3) and (4); in this case, a preferred action (answering a question) precedes a dispreferred action (challenging the co-participant), with *ja* occurring in the sentence performing the dispreferred action. Thus, we see another example where a preceding preferred action and the modal particle *ja* may be working together to preserve social solidarity during the performance of a dispreferred action.

As all three commenters are shown in the picture, we know that the participants have a shared knowledge of the situation being discussed. Consequently, the assessment in which the modal particle *ja* occurs refers to this shared prior knowledge (i.e. that Kelli did in fact drink alcohol) in order to answer a question. This assessment also asserts that

Kelli is guilty, even though she appears innocent. Thus, we have another instance of *ja* functioning in an assessment to indicate the commenter's presupposition that the co-participant will not object to the proposed assertion due to evidence in support of the assertion, which in this case is a shared knowledge of the experience being discussed. Interestingly, in line 5, Kelli does in fact agree with Martha's assessment by justifying her innocence with an assertion that she appears innocent because the only beverage she consumed all weekend was orange juice. In order to provide an agreeing response, Kelli lies and continues to pretend to be 'innocent,' even though Martha has already (indirectly) asserted that she is guilty. Her justification is followed by a wink-smile emoticon, which suggests that she is being sarcastic and going along with the "inside joke."

Additionally, the occurrence of *ja* after *obwohl* 'although' and before the adjective *unschuldig* suggests that the modal particle *ja* functions with these words to challenge the view of the co-participant. Note that Kelli's response reveals that Martha's contradicting assessment was interpreted as joking and playful, not as serious and critical, even though Martha did not produce a positive-emotion emoticon. Thus, *ja* occurs as part of a dispreferred action, which is still interpreted as joking even without the usage of emoticons.

Example (15) contains the final example of an assessment with *ja* which acts as part of a question-answer sequence.

#### Example (15)

1 Jenny: Still ill? Wie Morrissey? ;-)

*Still ill? Like Morrissey? [wse]*

*Still ill? Like Morrissey? [wse]*

2 Ruth: Na ja, is schon fast wieder jut. Und am Ende des Tages isses **ja** auch nur 'ne

*well, is yet almost again good. And in end of+the day is+it mp mp only a well, I am almost good again. And at the end of the day it is only a*

3 Erkältung, will ich auch nicht überdramatisieren. Is halt nur echt ätzend -.-

*cold, want I also not over dramatize. Is just only truly lousy [ffme]*

*cold, I don't want to over dramatize. It is just truly lousy [ffme]<sup>32</sup>*

<sup>32</sup> [ffme] = front-facing-melancholy emoticon

In line 1, Jenny asks if Ruth is still sick, so we know that there has been previous discussion of Ruth's condition prior to this conversation. As a joke, Jenny uses the alternative meaning of *ill* as 'cool' and asks if Ruth is like Morrissey (a popular British singer-songwriter). However, Ruth does not respond to the joke and instead answers Jenny's yes/no question pertaining to the meaning of *ill* as 'sick.' Beginning with the response token *na ja* 'oh well,' Ruth informs Jenny that she is still sick, but getting better. Then, Ruth produces an assessment with *ja* of the severity of her illness, downgrading her condition from an illness to merely a cold. As a justification for the assessment, Ruth clarifies that she doesn't want to be overdramatic even though having the cold is 'lousy.'

In this example, Ruth produces an assessment containing *ja* in order to answer a question while also correct the co-participant's evaluation of how sick she really is. Although Jenny is aware of Ruth's sickness, this assessment provides Jenny with more accurate knowledge of the situation (i.e. that Ruth only has a cold). Weydt (1983) notes that when *auch* 'also' is used as a modal particle, its meaning can be "intensified" when combined with *ja*. As a particle, *auch* supposedly links together previously spoken about ideas (Weydt et al. 1983, p. 72). As seen in this example, the particle combination *ja auch* can be used to correct shared knowledge of a situation by "linking" together the current statement with a prior statement, which in this case was most likely produced the first time the girls discussed Ruth's cold. Even though this example aligns with Weydt's description, it is important to note that the effect of *ja* in this assessment could only have been judged through analysis of the entire context; without considering Jenny's question, it would be difficult to realize that this assessment is providing corrected information pertaining to a previously discussed issue.

#### b.) Response to an Announcement or Telling

Within the collected data, I found seven positive assessments containing *ja* which were produced in response to an announcement or telling. It has been pointed out in the literature that when a speaker produces an announcement, a noticing, or a telling, it is expected of the co-participants to assess what they have been told (Golato 2005, p. 108;



Auer & Uhmann 1982). These assessments refer to the news that they follow and display not only that the information has been received, but also how the co-participant has analyzed what has been talked about.

In the case that an announcement pertains to an achievement accomplished by an interactant, co-participants typically respond with a compliment (Golato 2005, p.109), as shown in the following segment (Example (16)).

Rachel posted a comment on Heidi's wall after learning that Heidi had received a job as a teacher. Although the announcement does not appear in prior conversation, it is likely that the news was posted somewhere on Heidi's profile, or that the information was relayed to Rachel outside of studiVZ.

#### Example (16) Congratulations

- 1 Rachel: herzlichen glückwunsch Heidi,  
*best wishes [name],*  
*congratulations [name],*
- 2 bei mir warst **ja** schon viel früher lehrerin!  
*with me were mp already much earlier teacher!*  
*To me you were already a teacher!*
- 3 Du siehst wirklich gut aus  
*you look really good sp*  
*you look really good*
- 4 ich wünsch dir das alle deine träume in  
*I wish to+you that all your dreams in*  
*I wish that all of your dreams*
- 5 erfüllung gehen, du arbeitest **ja** immerhin hart  
*fulfillment go, you work mp after+all hard*  
*come true, you work hard after all*
- 6 dafür und hast es verdient  
*for+it and have it earned*  
*for it, and you have earned it*
- 7 viel liebe grüße rachel  
*many dear regards [name]*  
*many best wishes [name]*

As this entire message was posted at once, all of the comments above can be considered as a response to the announcement and part of an overall “congratulations,” as seen by Rachel’s initial response to the news in line 1. After congratulating Heidi, Rachel states in line 2 that she considered Heidi to be a teacher before it was official. As this comment directly follows a “congratulations,” it can be seen as a compliment which reveals that Rachel had confidence in Heidi’s ability to get a job as a teacher. In this statement, the modal particle *ja* occurs after the conjugated verb and before the adverb *schon* ‘already.’ It has been suggested by Weydt (1983) that *schon* can also occur as a modal particle which expresses a speaker’s confidence that a stated assumption or expectation is correct.<sup>33</sup> In this case, Rachel expected Heidi to eventually get a job as a teacher, and this supposition is confirmed to be true (as Heidi did in fact receive an official job as a teacher). Thus, it is possible that *schon* is functioning not as an adverb, but as a modal particle as described by Weydt, with *ja* functioning together with it to convey Rachel’s confidence in Heidi. In line 3, Rachel compliments Heidi’s appearance, and in line 4 she hopes that all of Heidi’s dreams come true. In line 5, Rachel compliments Heidi on her work ethic with a positive assessment containing *ja* which serves to justify Heidi’s success. The modal particle *ja* occurs after the conjugated verb and before the word *immerhin* ‘after all,’ which suggests that Heidi’s diligent work ethic is known by both participants; yet again, we see a correlation between the occurrence of *ja* and a reference to shared knowledge.

Assessments containing *ja* were also found as responses to tellings which deliver “news,” where news is some sort of new information. As displayed in the following two examples, recipients often provide assessments of newly received information within their overall response to a telling.

#### Example (17) Update

1 Viveka: Einen lieben Gruß zum Wochenende wünsche ich

*A     dear    regard to+the   weekend     wish     I*  
*I wish you the best wishes for the weekend!*

2                dir! Einen Monat am Konzerthaus habe ich

<sup>33</sup> Mit *schon* als Abtönungspartikel drückt der Sprecher seine Zuversicht aus, daß die Vermutung richtig ist. Das wirkt oft beruhigend (Weydt 1983, p. 44).

- to+you! *A month at+the concert+house have I*  
*I managed for a month at the concert house,*  
 3 geschafft. Habe mich schon etwas einleben können.  
*managed. Have rf already somewhat settle can*  
*I have somewhat settled in.*
- 4 Mal gucken, wann ich hier auf die Piste gehe. War  
*once look, when I here to the runway go. Was*  
*we'll see what happens, when I paint the town red. I was*
- 5 ja am letzten We im K....  
*mp on last weekend in+the [name of bar]...*  
*at the K. last weekend...*
- 6 Jenell: Hey, das klingt **ja** super. Wie war's denn im K.  
*Hey, that sounds mp super. How was+it mp in+the [name of bar]*  
*Hey, that sounds super. How was it at the [name of bar]*
- 7 in good old R.? Ich dachte, dass B. viel  
*in good old [city<sup>1</sup>]? I thought, that [city<sup>2</sup>] much*  
*in good old [city<sup>1</sup>]? I thought that [city<sup>2</sup>] was much*
- 8 besser ist zum Weggehen. Ich war gestern bei ner  
*better is to+the going+out. I was yesterday at a*  
*better for going out. Yesterday I was at a*
- 9 Hausparty in K., super nette Leute. Langsam  
*house+party in [city<sup>3</sup>], super nice people. Slowly*  
*house party in [city<sup>3</sup>], super nice people. One slowly*
- 10 lebt man sich ein :-). Liebe Grüße nach B.  
*settle one rf sp [se] dear regards to [city<sup>2</sup>]*  
*starts to settle in [se] Best wishes in [city<sup>2</sup>]*
- 11 und ich wünsche dir einen schönen 1. Advent!  
*and I wish to+you a great first+of Advent!*  
*And I wish you a great first of Advent!*

The above data sample begins with a telling by Viveka, in which she updates her friend from home, Jenell, about her first month living in a new city. Jenell replies in line 6 with a greeting (*Hey*) followed by a positive assessment containing the modal particle *ja*. This assessment is not an assessment of the telling itself, but rather of the actions presented in the telling; Jenell thinks that Viveka's situation in her new city sounds *super*.

The rest of Jenell's message contains questions about events mentioned in Viveka's telling, as well as a story about attending a house party in the city where Jenell lives. In response to Viveka's remark that she is still settling in, Jenell shows affiliation in lines 9-10 by reminding Viveka that the transition to life in a new city is often a slow one; with usage of the smile emoticon, Jenell may be trying to comfort her friend with this remark. To conclude her post, Jenell wishes her friend well and produces a holiday greeting.

Within this interaction, Jenell produces many second pair parts in response to Viveka's telling. In verbal conversation, it would not be necessary for Jenell to produce all of these responses at one time. However, since the girls are communicating through this particular medium, it is possible for Jenell to respond to Viveka's telling with a variety of different speech acts, the first of which being a positive assessment containing *ja* which evaluates Viveka's news. In this assessment, *ja* occurs after the conjugated verb and directly before the adjective *super*. The structure of the above assessment is very similar to the structure of first pair part positive assessments discussed in section 5.1(c). Even though the positive assessment in Example (17) is produced as a second pair part, I suggest that it is functioning similar to these previously discussed first pair part positive assessments. Due to the particular syntactical environment in which *ja* occurs (i.e. directly before the adjective *super*), *ja* may function to emphasize the positiveness of this describing adjective.

In the next example, the modal particle *ja* also occurs in a positive assessment of previously delivered news, with the assessment again being the first sentence of that post.

#### Example (18) Return of borrowed notes

- 1 Klara: hey lena,  
           *hey [name],*  
           *hey [name],*
- 2       ich wollte nur bescheid sagen, weil ich morgen eher nich zum T. kommen werde,  
           *I wanted only notification say, because I tomorrow rather not to+the [building] come will,*  
           *I wanted to let you know that I will not be coming to the [building] tomorrow*
- 3       aber ich hab ja noch deine blätter!  
           *but I have mp still your sheets!*

*but I still have your notes!*

4 ich hab morgen nur von 8-10, aber vll kann ich sie dir ja irgendwie wieder geben.

*I have tomorrow only from 8-10, but perhaps can I them to+you mp somehow again give.*

*Tomorrow I have class from 8-10, but perhaps<sup>34</sup> I can somehow give them back to you.*

5 auf jeden fall schon mal vielen dank fürs ausleihen...das fragezeichen in meinem kopf is

*In every case yet once many thanks for+the borrow... the question+mark in my head is*

*In any case thank you for the loan... the question mark in my head*

6 schon kleiner geworden: )

*yet smaller become [se]*

*has become smaller [se]*

7 lg klara

*dear regards [name]*

*best wishes [name]*

8 Lena: Heeey,

*Heeey,*

*Heeey,*

9 das ist **ja** super,dass das Fragezeichen nicht mehr ganz so groß ist! :-) Schon ein

*that is mp super, that the question+mark not more very so big is! [se] Already a*

*that is super, that the question mark is no longer so big! [se] It is*

10 Fortschritt, meine werden mit der Zeit jetzt auch immer Stück für Stück

*Progress, mine became with the time now also ever bit for bit*

*progress, with time mine became bit by bit*

11 kleiner... Ich hab morgen auch von 8-10 und bin danach im Arkadenhof, kannst

*smaller... I have tomorrow auch from 8-10 and am afterwards in+the arcade+court, can*

*smaller... Tomorrow I also have class from 8-10 and afterwards I will be in the arcade court,*

12 sie mir dann geben, falls wir uns verpassen, ist nicht schlimm, dann eben

*they to+me then give, if we us miss, is not bad, then even*

*you can give them to me then, but if we miss each other, it's not a problem, then you can give*

13 nächste Woche! Bis morgen Klara ;-)

*next week! Until tomorrow [name] [wse]*

*them to me next week! See you tomorrow [name] [wse]*

14 Liebe Grüße

*dear regards*

---

<sup>34</sup> vll = vielleicht 'perhaps'

- best wishes*
- 15      Lena.  
           *[name].*  
           *[name].*
- 16 Klara: nene morgen warte ich so lange bis wir uns gefunden haben: )  
           *No tomorrow wait I as long until we us found have [se]*  
           *No tomorrow I will wait until we have found each other [se]*
- 17      super dass das klappt!  
           *super that it fits!*  
           *It's super that it has worked out!*
- 18      wünsch dir noch einen schönen abend und bis morgen  
           *wish to+you still a great evening and until tomorrow*  
           *Hope you have a great evening and see you tomorrow*
- 19      lg klara  
           *dear regards [name]*  
           *best wishes [name]*

In Example (18), Klara contacts Lena to let her know that on the following day, she will not be at the building where they normally see each other, and therefore she cannot give Lena back her notes. In her message, Klara informs Lena of when she has class, and then proposes that they meet up at some point so she can return the notes. In lines 5-6, Klara thanks Lena for letting her borrow the notes, and adds that the notes were helpful and that she now understands the material better (note the smile emoticon following this remark). In line 8, Lena first responds with a greeting (*Heeey*) and then produces a positive assessment containing *ja*, with *ja* occurring after the conjugated verb and before the adjective *super*, just as in Example (17). In Example (18), we again find an assessment evaluating the action presented in the prior telling; Lena thinks it is super that Klara understands the material better. Considering the similar context in which *ja* occurs in this example, I suggest that it is functioning to emphasize the positiveness of the adjective *super*, just as in Example (17). After producing the assessment with *ja*, Lena shows affiliation with Klara by telling her of her own slow progress in learning the material bit by bit. In the rest of Lena's post, she informs Klara of her schedule for the following day and suggests that they meet after 10 to exchange the notes. In lines 16-18,

Klara confirms the appointment to meet and expresses her joy that the situation has worked out; however, Klara does not directly address Lena's prior positive assessment.

Auer and Uhmann (1982) note that the sequential organization of news delivery is often with the delivery of news as the first pair part followed by commentary provided as the second pair part. Therefore, a first pair part telling may be interpreted as a first pair part assessment when the commenter's attitude about the subject matter is implied in the telling (Auer & Uhmann 1982, p. 25). If this is the case, then the commentary produced in response may be considered a responding second assessment. In Example (17), Viveka provides a rather positive explanation of her situation, and in Jenell's response, we see that the information was interpreted as such. Similarly, in Example (18) Klara thanks Lena for helping to "make the question mark in her head smaller;" Lena's response to learning that her notes were helpful establishes that Klara's better understanding of the material is thought to be positive by both participants. In this way, the abovementioned positive assessments containing *ja* function as responses to a telling and as second pair part assessments. An initial assessment invites a subsequent agreement or disagreement (Pomerantz 1984, p. 63). Since both of the positive assessments containing *ja* follow the delivery of positive news, I suggest that the usage of *ja* functions to indicate this "same" evaluation of the news. Furthermore, the assessments containing *ja* in the examples above are proffered to show agreement in a situation where agreement is implied by the content and delivery of the news. As second pair parts, these agreeing assessments move the news-commentary sequences to a close.

In the remaining four examples, assessments containing *ja* are produced in response to a telling, where the telling is embedded into the second pair part position of a question-answer sequence. These particular assessments function as sequence-closing thirds. In English, sequence-closing thirds are accomplished "by information-registering 'oh,' by action-accepting 'okay,' by assessment terms, and by relatively few other forms" (Schegloff 2007, p. 221). In the following data samples, an initial commenter produces a question as a first pair part. Then, a second commenter answers the question. The third post in the conversation contains an assessment with *ja* which articulates the initial commenter's stance towards the second commenter's response to the question. An

assessment in the third position moves such question-answer sequences to a close, as seen in the following data segment:

Example (19) Acceptance of friendship request<sup>35</sup>

- 1 Claudia: womit hab ich denn die freundschaftseinladung verdient? =>  
*whereby have I mp the friendship+invitation earned? [se]*  
*With what have I earned the friendship invitation? [se]*
- 2 viele liebe grüße  
*many dear regards*  
*many best wishes*
- 3 claudia ^^  
*[name] [ese]*  
*[name] [ese]*
- 4 Alyson: hey Claudia  
*hey [name]*  
*hey [name]*
- 5 ich habe für Wintersemester 2007 an der Uni B. studiert und dort habe  
*I have for winter+semester 2007 at the [university] studied and there have*  
*I studied at the [university] during the winter semester of 2007 and I got to know*
- 6 ich viele cool Leute kennengelernt -- Ich bin neugierig darüber, wie  
*I many cool people gotten+to+know -- I am curious about, how*  
*many cool people there -- I am curious about how*
- 7 Deutsche auf studiVZ kommuniziert, und ich mache gerade Forschung  
*Germans on studiVZ communicate, and I do currently research*  
*Germans communicate on studiVZ, and I am currently conducting research*
- 8 daran. Ich habe deine Seite auf einer Seite meines Freundes gesehen –  
*on+it. I have your page on a page of+my friends saw -*  
*on the subject. I saw your profile page on one of my friends pages -*
- 9 deshalb habe ich dir eine freundschaftseinladung geschickt. muss mal sagen –  
*Therefore have I to+you a friendship+invitation sent. must once say --*  
*So I sent you a friendship invitation. I must say --*
- 10 ich habe einen guten Freund, der aus D. kommt -- als ich in

<sup>35</sup> This conversation was posted on my studiVZ wall, and thus “Alyson” in this conversation is myself. Please note that I am not a native speaker of German.



- I have a good friend, that from [city] comes – when I in  
I have a good friend who comes from [city] -- when I was in*
- 11 Deutschland war, habe ich oft die Stadt besucht. Vielen Dank für deine  
*Germany was, have I often the city visited. Many thanks for your  
Germany, I often visited the city. Thanks a lot for your*
- 12 Freundschaft auf studiVZ und wenn du Fragen über meine Forschung  
*Friendship on studiVZ and if you questions about my research  
friendship on studiVZ and if you have any questions about*
- 13 stellen moechtest, bitte sag mir einfach Bescheid  
*set would+like, please say to+me simply notification  
my research, please just let me know*
- 14 peace : Alyson  
*Peace : Alyson  
peace : Alyson*
- 15 Claudia: hi ^^ hört sich **ja** interessant an, was ist das denn für eine forschung?  
*Hi[ese]sounds rf mp interesting sp, what is that mp for a research?  
Hi [ese] that sounds interesting, what type of research is it?*
- 16 vlg, claudia =)  
*many dear regards, [name] [se]  
many best wishes, [name][se]*

The above conversation occurred between myself and another user of studiVZ after I requested to be her “friend” on studiVZ. It is not uncommon to question someone about a requested “friendship invitation,” and Claudia does just that in line 1. In response, I explain that I am curious about how Germans interact on studiVZ, and that I had for that reason requested her “friendship” after seeing that she was a “friend” of another friend of mine. I produce a short story about my experience in Germany, and I tell her to ask if she has any questions about the research I am conducting. In line 15, Claudia responds with the greeting *hi* followed by an eyebrow-smile emoticon and an assessment containing *ja*, which evaluates the prior explanation as ‘interesting.’ This assessment functions as a sequence-closing third, with a new conversation beginning with Claudia’s question about my research. In my response to this question, I explain that I

am investigating the function of the modal particle *ja*.<sup>36</sup> However, as the above comments were produced before I told Claudia that I was examining modal particles, her usage of *ja* could not have been influenced by this information.

In the assessment above containing *ja*, the verb occurs in the first position, which violates prescriptive German grammar, as verb-first constructions are typically yes/no questions and imperatives (Auer 1993). However, Golato found that compliment utterances in German often have a verb-first construction (Golato 2005). Auer's data for spoken German yielded similar findings, and Auer notes that such utterances occur in very specific conversational positions: when speakers narrate, modify the epistemic stance of an utterance, elaborate or restate something, provide answers (i.e. second pair parts), or when they provide assessments (Auer 1993). Thus, the verb-first construction of this assessment aligns with Auer's findings. Golato notes that for compliments (which are a form of positive assessment), the verb-first clauses are connected with preceding utterances and context, and they are often used to show cohesion between current and previous utterances or context (Golato 2005, p. 74); in this example, the assessment containing *ja* is used to connect Claudia's evaluation of the prior telling as 'interesting' with my answer to her initial question. The telling produced in lines 5-9 has an implied positiveness, and thus Claudia's sequence-closing assessment can be seen as a second assessment of the situation (i.e. she agrees that my reasons for "friending" her are positive and appropriate). Second assessments in spoken language frequently display a verb-first construction, and in a computer-mediated context, we see this construction used for assessments produced in response to a satisfactory answer to a question.

The modal particle *ja* occurs after the reflexive pronoun *sich* (which functions with the verb *anhören* 'to sound') and directly before the describing adjective *interessant* 'interesting.' Seeing that this assessment is positive, I suggest that *ja* emphasizes the positiveness of the adjective and of the overall message while showing that the answer provided in the second position was satisfactory. Golato found that compliments with empty topic positions (i.e. verb-first constructions) occur when all speakers shared a common orientation (focus) to the assessable. Furthermore, speakers use empty topic slot constructions in order to "create cohesion between themselves and their co-participants"

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<sup>36</sup> The entire conversation can be found in Appendix 2

(Golato 2005, p. 75). The above example contains a verb-first structured assessment with *ja* which serves to positively assess an answer to a question while bringing the sequence to a close. Thus, for this specific interactional environment (i.e. in response to an answer of a question), I suggest that the modal particle *ja* functions with the verb-first construction to connect the positive assessment with the co-participant's response and to show a shared common orientation to the referent (i.e. the telling). Additionally, the verb-first construction plus *ja* and a positive adjective may also reveal that the second pair part answer was understood and considered satisfactory (i.e. a preferred response).

The next two examples also contain an assessment with *ja* as a sequence-closing third. However, in these examples, the verb occurs in the second position, preceded by the word *dann* 'then.'

#### Example (20) Taken care of

- 1 Didrika: Hey Jenemäuschen,  
*hey [diminutive of a name]*  
*hey [diminutive of a name]*
- 2 sorry Du, aber irgendwie haben wir Dich gestern im  
*sorry you, but somehow have we you yesterday in+the*  
*sorry, but somehow we lost you yesterday in the*
- 3 K. verloren ... hoffe der Sebastian hat gut auf  
*[name of bar] lost ...hope the [name] had good to*  
*[name of bar] ... hope that [name] took good care*
- 4 Dich aufgepasst ...?!;-)  
*you pay+attention...?! [wse]*  
*of you ... ?! [wse]*
- 5 \*Dicken Knuuutschaaa\*  
*\* fat smooch \**  
*\* fat smooch \**
- 6 PS: Was machen die "Pictures\* ...???
- 7 PPS: die Woche vielleicht mal Kääffchen oder Mensa??;-)

*PPS: During the week perhaps we could get a coffee or go to the canteen?? [wse]*

- 8 Jenell: Ja, hat er, bis das Licht anging ;-). Schön, dass  
*Yes, had he, until the light on+went [wse] nice, that*  
*Yes, he did, until the light came on [wse] It was nice that*
- 9 ihr da wart. War echt schön. Bilder sind jetzt  
*you+all there were. Was truly nice. Pictures are now*  
*you all were there. It was truly nice. The pictures are now*
- 10 online und klar treffen wir uns diese Woche.  
*online and clearly meet we rf this week*  
*online and of course we will meet this week*
- 11 \*freu\*  
*\*glad\**  
*\*I look forward to it\**
- 12 Didrika: Okay, dann bin ich **ja** beruhigt ... \*Danke\* Sebastian...;-)  
*Okay, then am I mp reassured ... \*Thanks\* [name] ... [wse]*  
*Okay, then I am reassured ... \*Thanks\* [name] .... [wse]*
- 13 Bis die Tage ...\*freu mich\*  
*until the days ... \*glad rf \**  
*until later ... \*I look forward to it\**

In this example, Didrika apologizes for losing sight of Jenell at a bar, and in lines 3-4 Didrika states that she hopes Sebastian (who apparently was with the girls at the bar) took good care of Jenell. This statement functions also as a question, which asks for confirmation that Jenell was taken care of, as well as for Jenell's opinion of the entire evening; the written pause followed by the punctuation ?! and the wink-smile emoticon contribute to the interrogative functioning of this remark. Didrika concludes her post with a question about when Jenell will be posting pictures on studiVZ and an invitation to meet up for coffee or food at some point during the coming week.

In line 8, Jenell responds first to Didrika's question about whether or not Sebastian took good care of her; Jenell directly answers the question with *Ja* 'yes' and then proceeds to explain what happened between her and Sebastian after they became separated from Didrika. Jenell's positive assessment of the evening (lines 8-9) can also be seen as part of her response to Didrika's question. Jenell concludes her post by

answering the question about when the pictures will be posted (i.e. they are already posted) and accepting Didrika's invitation to meet up during the coming week.

In line 12, Didrika responds to Jenell's answer to the question posed in lines 3-4. First, Didrika writes *Okay*, which signals that she understands Jenell's response and accepts the actions described (Schegloff 2007, p. 123). Then, Didrika produces an evaluation of her state (i.e. reassured), which shows that Jenell provided the preferred response to her inquiry. The expression of gratitude to Sebastian and the wink-smile emoticon support that Didrika understands and approves of the news delivered by Jenell in response to the question.

The modal particle *ja* occurs in an assessment which serves as a sequence-closing third, as no further discussion of the issue takes place after this assessment. The assessment begins with *dann* 'then,' which can function as a temporal adverb or temporal (coordinating) conjunction (Grebe et al. 1966). When used as a temporal adverb, *dann* is demonstrative, indicating that something is being referred to. Furthermore, many of the temporal adverbs (including *dann*) can also act as temporal conjunctions which serve to connect nouns, noun phrases, verbs, clauses, etc. (Grebe et al. 1966).<sup>37</sup> In this case, *dann* functions as a conjunction, serving to connect Didrika's assessment with Jenell's response to the question posed in lines 3-4. As *dann* has been classified as demonstrative, it makes sense that it occurs in an assessment which inherently has a referent; in this example, both *dann* and the assessment which it occurs in are referring back to the action described in Jenell's telling. The modal particle *ja* occurs after the subject of the sentence and before the adjective *beruhigt* 'reassured.' I suggest that the use of *dann* and the modal particle *ja* serve to connect Didrika's current state of relief and reassurance to Jenell's answer to the question, as well as to signify that Jenell's answer is satisfactory (which is supported by the concluding smile emoticon).

A second example of a sequence-closing assessment containing both *dann* and *ja* is presented below:

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<sup>37</sup> Für die gelegentlich nebenordnend im konjunkionalen Sinne gebrauchten Zeitadverbien gilt das gleiche wie für die zuvor genannten Lokaladverbien (Grebe et al. 1966, p. 335).

## Example (21) Yellow car

- 1 Aksel: Haste mich heute in meinem gelben Flitzer erkannt  
*have+you me today in my yellow [type of car] recognized*  
*Did you recognize me today in my yellow [type of car]*
- 2 oder wieder ma einfach nur so aus Spaß dumm geguckt? ;) )  
*or again once simply just so from fun dumb looked? [wse]*  
*or were you simply looking around dumbly just for fun? [wse]*
- 3 Rodger: nene...ich hab dich gesehen...hatte so ne  
*no ... I have you seen ... had so a*  
*no ... I saw you ... I had a*
- 4 vorahnung und musste ja quasi um deinen kutscher  
*anticipation and must mp virtually at your driver*  
*sense that it was you and had to look around in order to*
- 5 rumgucken :-)  
*around+look [se]*  
*see the driver [se]*
- 6 Aksel: Dann is **ja** jut ... frohes fest und bis zum Silvestertraining ;) )  
*then is mp good...happy holiday and until to+the New+Year's+training [wse]*  
*then that is good... happy holidays and see you at training in the New Year [wse]*

In lines 1-2 of Example (21), Aksel wants to know whether Rodger had seen him earlier that day driving around in a sports car (we can assume that Aksel saw Rodger), or if Rodger was looking around with a ‘dumb’ expression on his face ‘just for fun.’ This question is requesting information while also jokingly insulting the co-participant (notice the wink-smile emoticon). In lines 3-4, Rodger directly answers Aksel’s question about looking around dumbly with *nene* ‘no,’ and then Rodger produces a telling about how he saw Aksel but had to turn around in order to see who the driver was. The smile emoticon at the end of Rodger’s post suggests that Aksel’s (joke) insult was not taken seriously. Also, the smile emoticon hints that Rodger provided a preferred response to Aksel’s question. In line 6, Aksel produces a positive assessment containing *ja*, which is evaluating not only what was presented in the previous telling but also the telling itself (i.e. Rodger’s response was satisfactory). Just as in the previous example, this assessment functions as a sequence-closing third, with *dann* in the first position

functioning as a conjunction. Also, *ja* once again occurs before a positive adjective (*gut* ‘good’). With a similar structure to the assessment in Example (20), the above data segment serves as another example of the conjunction *dann* working together with the *ja* to connect the assessment in which they occur to a previous comment (in this case, Rodger’s telling in response to Aksel’s question).

As the final example of a third position assessment containing *ja*, the assessment in Example (22) brings a repeating sequence of personal state inquiries to a close. In this case, the assessment occurred as part of a repeating “what-are-you-up-to” sequence, where the same sequence type is repeated with a change in speakership and recipientship of its key parts (Schegloff 2007, p. 207).

#### Example (22) Soulmates

- 1 Beth: Matthias, fesch Foto;) Wie geht's dir? Haben ja schon ewig nichts mehr  
*[name], stylish photo [wse] How goes+it to+you? Have mp yet forever nothing more*  
*[name], stylish photo [wse] How's it going? It has been forever since we've heard*
- 2 voneinander gehört. Was machst du? Liebe Grüße. Beth  
*of+each+other heard. What do you? Dearest Regards [name]*  
*from each other. What are you up to? Best Wishes [name]*
- 3 Matthias: Hey Süße ;-)) Danke für's Kompliment\*hehe\* Gut  
*Hey sweetie [wse] Thanks for+the compliment \*hehe\* Good*  
*Hey sweetie [wse] Thanks for the compliment \*hehe\* It's going*
- 4 geht's mir! Ich mache so dies und das (und  
*goes+it to+me! I do so this and that ( and*  
*good with me! I am doing this and that ( and*
- 5 manchmal auch das und dies^^) Und wie geht's dir  
*sometimes also that and this [ese]) And how goes+it to+you*  
*sometimes also that and this [ese]) And how's it going with*
- 6 so??? Alles im BGB (Becks-Grünen -Bereich) ?! Ja,  
*so??? All in+the BGB (Becks- Green - Area)?! Yes,*  
*you??? Everything ok in the BGB (Becks-Green-Area)?! Yes,*
- 7 ist wirklich schon lange her-müssen mal wieder n  
*is really yet long ago- must once again a*

- it has really been a long time - we should go get a*
- 8 Kaffee trinken gehen-wenn de mal Zeit hast! Hoffe  
*coffee drinking go - when you once time has! hope*  
*coffee again - when you have time! I hope*
- 9 sehr es geht dir gut!!! Liiiiiiiiiebe  
*much it goes to+you good!!! Dear*  
*very much that it's going good with you!!!*
- 10 Grüße!Salut ton Matthias :-)  
*regards! [greeting] [name] [se]*  
*best wishes! [greeting] [name] [se]*
- 11 Beth: Heey=) Ja alles im SBGB (super-Becks-grünen Bereich ;) Ich hoffe bei dir  
*Hey [se] Yes all in+the SBGB (super- Becks - green Area) [wse] I hope by you*  
*Hey [se] Yes everything ok in the SBGB (super-Becks-green area) [wse] I hope with you*
- 12 auch!!? Heey ich mache auch manchmal so dies und das;)  
*also!!? Hey I do also sometimes so this and that [wse]*  
*as well!!? Hey I also sometimes do this and that [wse]*
- 13 Jaa im Moment habe ich immer Zeit noch bis August also können wir gerne  
*Yes in+the moment have I always time still until August therefore can we gladly*  
*Yes at the moment I have lots of time until August so we can gladly*
- 14 mal n Kaffee trinken gehen oder n Milchshake und News austauschen=)  
*once a coffee drinking go or a milkshake and news exchange [se]*  
*once again get a coffee or a milkshake and exchange news [se]*
- 15 Wohnst du wieder in D.? Kannst dich ja mal melden. Hab ne neue Nummer:  
*live you again in [city]? can you mp once message. have a new number:*  
*Do you live in [city] again? You can call me. I have a new number:*
- 16 #####. Freue mich=) Liebe Grüße  
*[phone number] look+forward rf [se] dear regards*  
*[phone number] I look forward to it [se] best wishes*
- 17 Matthias: HeyHey^^ Waaaas....du machst auch manchmal gerne  
*hey hey [ese] what .... you do also sometimes gladly*  
*hey hey [ese] what .... you also sometimes like to do*
- 18 dies und das??? Es ist **ja** wirklich UNGLAUBLICH wie  
*this and that??? It is **mp** really unbelievable how*  
*this and that??? It is really unbelievable how*
- 19 viel wir gemeinsam haben-vll sind wir ja wirklich



- much we common have - perhaps are we mp really*  
*much we have in common - perhaps we are really*  
 20 Seelenverwandte...wie ich's mir ja schon immer  
*soul+relatives ... how I+it to+me mp yet always*  
*soul mates ... as I have always*  
 21 gedacht habe ;- ) Mir geht's ganz gut! Ja, wohne  
*thought have [wse] to+me goes+it very good! Yes, live*  
*thought [wse] It's going very good with me! Yes, I live*  
 22 wieder in D.-find eh ist die schönste  
*again in [city]- find it the nicest*  
*in [city] again - I find it the nicest*  
 23 Stadt der Welt! Schön dasste Zeit und Lust hast  
*city of+the world! nice that+you time and desire have*  
*city in the world! It's nice that you have time and desire*  
 24 fürn Kaffee! Freu mich dich mal wiederzusehen!!!  
*for+a coffee! look+forward rf you once again+to+see!!!*  
*for a coffee! I look forward to seeing you again!!!*

Beth begins the conversation with a compliment of Matthias' photo and a first pair part to a "how-are-you" sequence. She then establishes that it has been a while since she and Matthias have conversed and then produces a first pair part of a "what-are-you-up-to" sequence. Matthias produces a friendly greeting, a wink-smile emoticon, a thank-you in response to the compliment, and a second pair part to the "how-are-you" sequence. In lines 4-5, Matthias provides the second pair part to the "what-are-you-up-to" sequence, explaining that he's been up to 'this and that and sometimes also that and this.' In lines 5-6, Matthias begins a second "how-are-you" sequence, this time producing the first pair part. Beth does not provide the second pair part to the "how-are-you" sequence, but rather states what she's been up to (i.e. also this and that) in line 12, even though Matthias did not ask her what she's been up to. In lines 18-19, Matthias asserts that it is 'really unbelievable' how much he and Beth have in common; he does this by producing an assessment of this commonality which contains the modal particle *ja*. "How-are-you" sequences are often moved to a close by an assessment in the third position (Schegloff

2007, p. 125), and this data segment shows that a “what-are-you-up-to” sequence can also be brought to a close by an assessment in the third position.

The modal particle *ja* occurs before the adverb *wirklich* ‘really’ and the adjective *unglaublich* ‘unbelievable,’ and after the conjugated verb within Matthias’ assessment. As mentioned above, this assessment also asserts that Matthias and Beth have a lot in common, and it is possible that the modal particle *ja* in this assertion may be functioning to imply agreement and indicate Matthias’ assumption that Beth will agree with the assertion since the evidence of their commonality is observable within the previously exchanged wall postings. Additionally, the assessment containing *ja* shows that Beth’s second pair part response within a “what-are-you-up-to” was received, understood and approved of by Matthias. Furthermore, the position of the assessment within the “what-are-you-up-to” sequence (i.e. third position) may function together with the modal particle *ja* to conclude the sequence and reveal that Beth provided a preferred response within the sequence.

The data segments above display some of the interactional environments of the modal particle *ja*, namely in assessments which are responses to announcements or tellings, or in assessments provided as third-position responses to preferred second pair part productions. The data reveals that an assessment of an announcement or telling can be a verb-first construction containing the modal particle *ja*, or a construction with the conjunction *dann* ‘then’ in the first position. Additionally, the data shows one particular environment in which *ja* occurs, namely in assessments which may function as sequence-closing thirds within a “question-answer” sequence or a “what-are-you-up-to” sequence.

#### c.) Response to an assessment

It was shown in section 5.1 that an initial assessment may be proffered to accomplish an action such as to self-deprecate, notice, compliment, reproach, or express gratitude. In response to an initial assessment, a co-participant can show agreement or disagreement by producing a second assessment which aligns or disaligns with the proffered assessment (Pomerantz 1984, p. 63). However, the context of the conversation determines whether the preferred response to a first assessment is agreement or

disagreement with that assessment. Although agreement is the preferred next action in the majority of situations containing initial assessments, it is not invariably the preferred next action; for example, the preferred response to a self-deprecation is disagreement. Thus, the preferred next action is structured in part by the action performed by the initial assessment (Pomerantz 1984, p. 64). In general, agreements and disagreements with an initial assessment are performed in differently organized turns and sequences. Agreement turns are structured to maximize occurrences of stated agreement, and disagreement turns are structured so as to minimize occurrences of stated disagreements. Also, agreement with a prior assessment is generally produced immediately while disagreement is usually delayed. Although second assessment production on the internet has been found to be similar to second assessment production in face-to-face interactions (Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm 2006), differences between verbal and text-based communication affect the techniques employed to show agreement or disagreement, with features such as emoticons and written pauses serving as “nonverbal cues” within online interactions.

In this data corpus, five second assessments were found which contain the modal particle *ja*. Example (23) is a reproduction of Example (10), with the subsequent analysis focused on the second assessment in line 3 which expresses agreement with a prior assessment; in this particular context, agreement is the preferred response.

#### Example (23) Skeptical of sea creature

- 1 Nina: haha, das Bild ist ja lustig :-) Mit zwei Sieben in der Hand \*g\* Ich gucke ja sehr  
*haha the picture is mp funny [se] with two filters in the hand [ffse] ich look mp very*  
*haha this picture is funny [se] with two filters in my hand [ffse] I am looking very*
- 2 kritisch, aber was hält der mir denn auch da vor die Nase?  
*Skeptical, but what hold he me then also there before the nose?*  
*Skeptical, but what is he holding in front of my nose?*
- 3 Stan: das war **ja** auch voll der vogel der kerl:D  
*That was mp mp full the bird the fellow[se]*  
*That was good, that odd character, that fellow[se]*

In line 1, Nina posts a positive assessment of a picture of her and a group of people standing around a man who is holding a sea creature. Stan's response reveals that he was also present when the picture was taken since he is able to provide an assessment of the situation. Although Nina's assessment refers directly to the picture under which her comment was posted, the *das* 'that' in Stan's assessment refers to the actual event taking place at the time the picture was taken. Thus, we see that Stan agrees with Nina's positive assessment of the picture by positively evaluating the event captured in the picture. It is possible that Stan interpreted Nina's positive assessment of the picture to apply to the entire experience associated with when the picture was taken. One clue that Stan is agreeing with Nina even though he shifts the referent of evaluation in his assessment with *ja* is the smile emoticon at the conclusion of his comment.

With Stan's assessment, he addresses an event which occurred in the past and was experienced by both participants. Thus, we have another example of *ja* occurring with reference to common knowledge in order to show agreeing opinions of a shared experience. It is interesting to note that the first pair part assessment of this adjacency pair also contains the modal particle *ja*, suggesting that both participants assume other co-participants with access to the picture or shared knowledge of the event in the photo will also agree with their assessments. The modal particle *ja* occurs after the conjugated verb and before *auch*. Furthermore, this example is similar to Example (15), where *ja* and *auch* work together to link together previously spoken about ideas; in this case, the "idea" is a positive shared opinion of the event featured in the photograph.

The next example also contains a second assessment that shows agreement in a situation where agreement is preferred. Example (24) is a reproduction of Example (9), which contains a positive assessment in the first pair part position that functions as a noticing.

#### Example (24) Guinea Pigs

1 Karen: die sind ja süüüüß! Muss sie mir dann mal live angucken kommen...

*They are mp sweet ! must they to+me then once live look+at come ...*

*They are sweet! I must see them live in person...*

2 Jessica: oh mein gott sind die putzig...und diese salatkugel ist **ja** der knaller...

*Oh my God are they cute ... and this salad+sphere is mp the banger...*

*Oh my God they are cute... and this salad sphere<sup>38</sup> is the coolest...*

In line 2, Jessica produces a positive second assessment of the guinea pigs evaluated by Karen in the prior comment. After a series of dots, Jessica adds a positive assessment of the ‘salad sphere.’ This assessment with *ja* of the ‘salad sphere’ can be seen as a “noticing,” and thus Jessica shows that she notices the guinea pigs and the ‘salad sphere,’ and she expresses her positive opinion of both within her agreeing response to Karen’s assessment.

It should be noted that in Example (24), it is unclear whether or not Jessica’s comment was intentionally produced as a response to Karen’s post. These comments were posted as photo commentary, and neither comment is addressed to a specific recipient. As the picture of the guinea pigs was posted in an album on another user’s profile (i.e. not Karen’s or Jessica’s profile), it is possible that both comments are addressed to the person whose album the picture is a part of. Put differently, Jessica’s comment may be a first pair part noticing that was not influenced by Karen’s comment nor produced as a result of it. In any case, Jessica’s comment was posted after Karen’s (as displayed by the time appearing above the comment), and thus I am treating Jessica’s comment in line 2 as a response to a prior assessment (since there is no way of knowing whether Jessica did or did not produce her assessment in direct response to Karen’s prior evaluation).

It is interesting to note that the above positive assessment containing *ja* has a different referent than the assessment before the series of dots. Thus, although the whole comment is in response to a prior assessment, the first part of Jessica’s post contains a second assessment without *ja* that shows agreement with Karen’s assessment, and the second part of her post, which is separated from the first by a written pause, consists of a positive assessment with *ja* of a different referent (i.e. the ‘salad sphere’). Just as in the first pair part assessments discussed in section 5.1 (c), the assessment above with *ja* is a declarative sentence, with the referent as the subject of the evaluative statement rather than the commenter. Additionally, the referent is visually available to both participants, and thus we have another example where *ja* may be used to imply agreement and signal

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<sup>38</sup> *salatkugel* refers to a spherical container containing salad which is used as a feeding device for the guinea pigs

that the commenter does not anticipate disagreement due to strong evidence available in support of the evaluation.

In both examples discussed above, co-participants show agreement with a prior assessment by producing an assessment with *ja* of a different referent. Thus, second assessments containing *ja* have been found in comments that show agreement with prior assessments, but the assessments with *ja* are not actually evaluating the same referents as in the prior assessments.

The next example contains an assessment with *ja* which is being used to show disagreement with a prior assessment in a context where agreement is preferred.

#### Example (25) Unfortunately sober

- 1 Aksel: Morjen wieder fit? Wie gut dass wir 2 gestern nicht voll waren, aber war  
*morning again fit? how good that we two yesterday not full were, however was*  
*good morning recovered? How good that we weren't drunk yesterday, however it was still*  
 geil :D  
*awesome [se]*  
*awesome [se]*
- 2 Seth: extrem geiler Abend.... Ich war **ja** leider trocken...  
*extremely awesome evening .... I was mp unfortunately sober...*  
*extremely awesome evening ... I was, unfortunately, sober...*

In line 1, Aksel provides a positive assessment of the fact that a previous evening spent with the co-participant was still 'awesome,' even though they were apparently sober; the smile emoticon at the end of his assessment contributes to the positiveness of the assessment. As first pair part assessments are often produced without knowing the opinion of the co-participant, I suggest that Aksel proffers this assessment in order to find out Seth's opinion of the previous evening. In this way, the assessment is functioning to ask Seth if he still had fun even though they weren't drunk. In line 2, Seth reproduces Aksel's evaluation of the referent, upgrading the assessment with the adverb *extrem* 'extremely.' Upgraded following assessments in verbal interactions are often considered to show strong agreement with prior assessments. Usually, upgraded assessments occur in agreement turns and sequences, and not in combination with disagreements

(Pomerantz 1984, p. 66). However, an upgraded evaluation in conjunction with a subtle referent shift has been found to anticipate a speaker's partial disagreement with a prior assessment (Pomerantz 1984, p. 98). In Example (25), Aksel's initial assessment evaluates the fact that they weren't drunk yet were still able to have an awesome time; Aksel assesses this fact as 'good.' Seth's responding upgraded assessment has shifted the referent to the prior evening itself, and thus his upgraded positive assessment may only be functioning as part of a partial agreement. Frequently, disagreements are formed as partial agreements plus partial disagreements (Pomerantz 1984, p. 65). We see this particular formation of a disagreement in the above example, as Seth's upgraded assessment with a shifted referent is followed by a series of dots (written pause) and a negative assessment of the fact that they were sober (as realized through the adverb *leider* 'unfortunately'). The written pauses and lack of emoticons in Seth's comment suggest that he disagrees with Aksel's assessment that it was a good thing that they were sober yet still able to have a good time.

In this case, the modal particle *ja* occurs after the conjugated verb and before the adverb *leider*, which functions to negatively evaluate the fact that Seth was sober. Aksel is aware that he and Seth were sober, and his use of *aber* 'however' in the first pair part assessment reveals that he thinks not being drunk could have resulted in a 'not-awesome' evening, but in this case, he still had an 'awesome' time. Seth's second pair part assessment with *ja* at first shows confirmation that the evening was awesome, but then asserts that the evening was 'not-awesome' by referencing this mutual understanding about their sobriety. Thus, *ja* is again used in a situation where the common knowledge between the participants is important to the asserted evaluation; Seth negatively assesses his sobriety, which in turn shows that he disagrees with Aksel's initial assessment.

The final two examples presented below include a second pair part assessment containing *ja* which is produced within the context of a joke.

#### Example (26) Evil Clowns

- 1 Andrea: jetz hast du alle 2 tage n korrektes bild von nem  
           *now have you all two days a correct picture of a*  
           *now you have every other day a true picture of an*

- 2 evil clown am start, das find ich auch lustig^^  
*evil clown at+the start, that find I also funny [ese]*  
*evil clown at the start, and I find that funny [ese]*
- 3 Liebe grüße lass ich auch ma da...was geht sonst  
*dear regards let I also once there...what goes else*  
*Let me also wish you best wishes ... what else is going*
- 4 so bei dir timtim?alles klar soweit? :)  
*so with you [name]? all clear so+far? [se]*  
*on with you [name]? everything ok on the whole? [se]*
- 5 Timothy: ja bei mir is alles fresh... ja die clown sache  
*yes with me is all fresh ... yes the clown thing*  
*yes everything with me is fresh ... yes I think the clown thing*
- 6 find ich auch lustig und es gibt halt nichts  
*find I also funny and it gives just nothing*  
*is also funny and there is just nothing*
- 7 fieseres als nen bösen clown!!! das leibe ganz  
*creepier as a evil clown!!! the good very*  
*creepier than an evil clown !!! I find when the good*
- 8 böse, find ich geil!!!  
*evil find I awesome!!!*  
*is very evil it's awesome !!!*
- 9 greez  
*greetings*  
*greetings*
- 10 Andrea: ja das freut mich doch, wenn bei dir alles fresh  
*yes that pleases me too, when with you all fresh*  
*yes that pleases me you know, when everything with you is*
- 11 is...:)  
*is..[se]*  
*fresh [se]*
- 12 ich find die clowns auf jeden fall korrekt, böse  
*I find the clowns in any case true, evil*  
*I find the clowns absolutely true, evil*
- 13 und lieb vereint in einem...passt **ja** tim :D Lg  
*and good combined in one ... fits **mp** [name] [se] dear regards*



- and good combined in one ... it fits you [name] [se] best wishes*
- 14 Timothy: ich sach immer, ich hab ne harte schale und nen  
*I say always, I have a hard shell and a*  
*I have always said, I have a hard shell and a*
- 15 weichen kern!!! like a coconut!^^  
*soft core !!! like a coconut! [ese]*  
*soft core !!! like a coconut! [ese]*
- 16 grüüüüüüüüüüße  
*greetings*  
*greetings*

Andrea has noticed that every other day, Tim posts a picture of an ‘evil clown’ on his profile, and she comments on his wall that she finds it funny. This positive assessment serves as a noticing and conversation-starter, and Andrea proceeds to greet Tim and produce the first pair part to a “what-are-you-up-to” sequence. In line 5, Tim first replies to the “what-are-you-up-to” sequence, and then he shows agreement with Andrea’s positive assessment of the clown pictures by producing the same evaluation. Tim claims that there is nothing as creepy as an ‘evil clown’ because it displays both good and evil, which he thinks is *geil* ‘awesome.’ In response, Andrea produces a third-position assessment and a smile emoticon, which closes the “what-are-you-up-to” sequence. In line 12, she shows agreement with Tim by restating her initial assessment along with his assessment of the clowns as ‘evil and good combined.’ After a written pause, Andrea then assesses Tim as ‘evil and good combined in one’ by claiming that these qualities ‘fit’ him. Thus, an initial agreement with a prior assessment (in a situation where agreement is preferred) occasions a negative assessment of a co-participant (which is a dispreferred action, as indicated by the preceding written pause). Although this could be interpreted as a co-participant criticism, the smile emoticon and friendly farewell indicate that Andrea is being facetious. Additionally, Tim’s agreement with Andrea’s assessment in lines 14-15 demonstrates that he was not insulted; in fact, Tim seems to find Andrea’s assessment to be positive and accurate. The production of an eyebrow-smile emoticon and a friendly farewell also suggest that Tim understood Andrea’s assessment of him as ‘evil and good combined in one’ to be part of a joke.

In this example, the modal particle *ja* occurs after the conjugated verb. There are no positive/negative descriptors within the assessment, but due to position of the assessment within this particular conversation, we see that the quality of ‘evil and good combined in one’ is being applied to the co-participant as part of a jesting negative assessment. This assessment is a declarative statement, which seems to be suggesting that it is appropriate that Tim (of all people) would post photos of evil clowns which represent both good and evil, since he can also be characterized as ‘evil and good combined in one.’ Thus, Andrea is comparing Tim to the evil clowns, and she expresses the similarities between the two referents within her assessment containing *ja*. In this case, the initial referent is a photo of an evil clown, but in the assessment containing *ja*, Andrea changes the assessable to Tim. Notice that Andrea does not use a second person pronoun (i.e. *dir* ‘to you’), but instead refers to Tim in the third person. Additionally, the assessment with *ja* in line 13 is another example of a verb-first construction, in which the verb-first clause is connected with a preceding utterance. As the modal particle *ja* occurs with a positive-emotion emoticon in a dispreferred action, I suggest that these features used together may have to do with mitigation, contributing to the joking aspect of the assessment. Additionally, the modal particle *ja* may be functioning to indicate Andrea’s assumption that Tim will agree with her assessment due to strong evidence in support of her assertion, with the evidence in this case being the apparent similarities between Tim and evil clowns. Indeed, we see that Tim agrees with her assessment, and thus he must have been aware of those similarities (i.e. common knowledge) in order to agree that they ‘fit’ him.

It was found by Auer and Uhmman (1982) in their study of second assessment productions in spoken German that second assessments have a “double structure,” with a non-evaluative particle (such as *ja* ‘yes’ or *naja* ‘o well’) as the first part and the actual assessment as the second.<sup>v</sup> With the exception of *Bewertungsbündel* ‘assessment bundles,’ which show agreement with an initial assessment (p. 6), all but one of the second assessments examined by Auer and Uhmman displayed this double structure (p. 10). The majority of agreeing second assessments contained *ja* as the first part of the assessment, and most of the disagreeing second assessments were preceded by the particle *(n)a ja* (Auer & Uhmman 1982, p. 11-12). However, all of the examples discussed

above in this paper lack a particle before the second assessment containing *ja*. In their study of web chats, Golato and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) also found cases in which the “tokens”<sup>39</sup> were missing, and they concluded that tokens could either be included or be left out of assessments showing agreement, whereas in disagreements, the token is always present, specifically in downgraded second assessments or in same strength second assessments that are disagreements (Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm 2006, p. 314). But the second assessments containing *ja* which are examined above lack the two-part structure when agreement or disagreement is shown. Put differently, all but one of the collected second assessments with *ja* in this data corpus do not begin with a particle; Example (27) is the only one which exhibits a second assessment with a double structure. The absence of a beginning particle in the collected samples could be a result of the particular medium being investigated (i.e. text-based communication rather than verbal). Auer and Uhmann (1982) stated that specific tokens were used for disagreeing second assessments in order to foreshadow a potential (slight) disagreement. In face-to-face interaction, the producer of the first assessment would then have the option of reformulating his or her first assessment. However, the first commenter in a conversation held on a studiVZ profile wall does not have the option of reformulating his or her first assessment (due to the technological restriction that a turn of a conversation appears as part of an entire comment post), and we see that commenters do not invariably produce a disagreement-implicit particle.

The data segment below is the only example of a second assessment containing both the modal particle *ja* and a first-position particle (which in this example is *ja*).

#### Example (27) Elite University

- 1 Christoph: na du wurst was geht denn da bei euch an der scheiss uni ab....ich hab  
*hey you sausage what goes then there with you+all at the shit university sp.... I have*  
*hey you sausage what is going on with you all at the shitty university .... I have*
- 2 *schon ferien seit freitag und ihr seid immer noch zu gange da oder was?!*  
*already vacation since Friday and you+all are ever yet to course there or what?!*

<sup>39</sup> Golato and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) used the term “token,” while Auer & Uhmann (1982) used the term *Partike* ‘particle.’ For this study, I chose to use the English translation of Auer & Uhmann’s term (i.e. particle).

- 3        *been on vacation since Friday and you all are still in full swing, right?!*  
 nächsten freitag noch eine klausur und dann bin ich erstmal für 2 wochen  
*next        Friday still    a    test        and then am I first+once for two weeks*  
*Next Friday I have one last test and then I will be with my brother*
- 4        bei meinem bruder...  
*with my    brother ...*  
*for two weeks ...*
- 5 Seth:    ey du bitch alles klar :-D  
*hey you bitch everything clear [se]*  
*hey you bitch it's all good [se]*
- 6 Seth:    ja man wir sind **ja** auch elite uni, wir müssen was tun im gegensatz zu  
*yes man we are **mp** also elite university, we must what do in contrast to*  
*yes man we are also an elite university, we have to do stuff in contrast to*
- 7        euch...aber im september habe ich zeit für dich :-D  
*you+all... but in September have I time for you [se]*  
*you all ... but in September I will have time for you [se]*

Christoph begins the conversation by calling Seth a *wurst* ‘sausage’ and producing the first pair part to a “what-are-you-up-to” sequence. The question in line 1 simultaneously assesses the university which Seth attends as *scheiss* ‘shit,’ and Christoph proceeds to criticize Seth’s university for still holding classes while his university allows him to be on vacation. The remainder of the post details Christoph’s plans for his vacation. Seth first responds to being called a *wurst* by calling Christoph a *bitch* ‘bitch.’ However, the smile emoticon at the end of this comment displays that the boys are joking around with each other. In a later post beginning in line 6, Seth responds to the negative assessment of his university with a positive assessment, which displays his disagreement with Christoph’s opinion of the university. The first part of the assessment is the particle *ja* followed by the word *man* ‘man,’ while the second part of the assessment is the actual disagreeing assessment (which contains the modal particle *ja*). As this assessment seems to have the “double structure” as described by Auer and Uhmann (1982), the introductory particle *ja* can be seen as a delay device and an indicator of a subsequent disagreeing remark. By defending his university’s reputation and disagreeing with Christoph’s claim that the university is ‘shit,’ Seth asserts that his university is ‘elite,’ just like Christoph’s.

Furthermore, Seth uses the fact that he is still in classes to justify the elite status of his university, claiming that he actually has to do work at his university in contrast to the students at Christoph's university. To conclude the conversation, Seth explains that he will have time to see Christoph in September, and then produces a smile emoticon, suggesting that the prior remarks in defense of his university were meant in jest. Since the boys are joking around with each other, it is difficult to say whether the preferred response to Christoph's initial assessment is agreement or disagreement. A preferred response would most likely be one that acknowledges the negative assessment as a joke. As a response, Seth continues the joke in lines 5-6 and produces two smile emoticons, which indicate that he did in fact interpret the negative assessment of his university as a joke rather than as an insult.

The modal particle *ja* occurs after the conjugated verb and before *auch*, which is functioning either as an adverb meaning 'also' or as a modal particle. In any case, the positive assessment is produced to show disagreement with a prior assessment. Unlike in Example (25), this disaligning assessment does not contain dispreferred response markers such as weakened agreements or written pauses. Rather, *ja* occurs in an assessment which disagrees as part of a joke. We see in Seth's response in lines 5-7 that he thinks Christoph is joking, so we can guess that Seth's university isn't really a bad university, and furthermore, that Christoph doesn't really think it is an inferior university. Thus, the modal particle *ja* occurs in an assessment referring to shared knowledge (i.e. the status of Seth's university) in order to correct a prior assessment within the context of a joke.

## 6. Conclusions

As background to my analysis of the modal particle *ja* in interactions occurring on the social networking website studiVZ, I first discussed previous studies of modal particles and how this study will differ due to the choice of methodology, the particular medium chosen for analysis, and the concentration on *ja* in a specific speech event, namely in assessments. I described in detail the different ways users of studiVZ interact with one another, with emphasis on how interactants communicate with each other in profile wall postings and comments posted within a photo album. I pointed out how

specific features of studiVZ communication, such as its asynchrony and availability to a large public audience, affect the way commenters organize their interactions and orient themselves within those interactions. Additionally, I demonstrated how commenters manage the limitations of communicating through a text-based medium by substituting emoticons and punctuation for nonverbal cues within interactions. Furthermore, I detailed aspects of the methodological framework of conversation analysis, and how the choice of this particular methodology was appropriate for this investigation due to its insistence on the examination of naturally occurring, unelicited data and emphasis on analysis of the entire sequence of interaction rather than just of isolated sentences.

The focus of this paper has been to describe the sequence and preference organization of studiVZ interactions in order to examine the interactional environment of the modal particle *ja* within assessment sequences. By looking at the different actions that assessments containing *ja* perform, I found that the modal particle *ja* occurred in:

- self-deprecations
- co-participant criticisms
- noticings
- thank-yous
- answers to yes/no questions
- second assessments
- responses to announcements and news
- responses to answers of previously asked questions (i.e. sequence-closing thirds)

Furthermore, the modal particle *ja* occurred in both preferred and dispreferred actions. Functioning together with emoticons, punctuation, sentence structure, and positioning within a sequence of interaction, the modal particle *ja* occurred in sixteen assessments that accomplished the preferred actions of:

- complimenting
- congratulating
- accepting an invitation

- agreeing with prior comments
- asserting a positive opinion of the referent

In addition, the modal particle *ja* occurred in five assessments that accomplished the dispreferred actions of:

- justifying a self-deprecation
- criticizing a co-participant
- reproaching a co-participant
- disagreeing with prior comments

I also found six examples of the modal particle *ja* within assessments performing dispreferred actions as part of a joke or sarcastic comment (Examples (3), (4), (13), (14), (26), (27)); the use of emoticons and written pauses within these examples was particularly important when considering the interactional environment of *ja* and the action being accomplished by the assessment containing *ja*. Many of the examples discussed above where *ja* occurs in a preferred action suggest that *ja* may function with the positive descriptor within the assessment to enhance the overall positiveness of the evaluation. Also, the analyses of assessments with *ja* that perform dispreferred actions reveal that *ja* may function with emoticons and written pauses as a form of mitigation.

As mentioned above, this conversation analytic study considers not only the particular statement that *ja* occurs in, but also comments posted after the production of an assessment with *ja* in order to observe how recipients understand and deal with the prior statement containing the modal particle. Interestingly, of all the assessments with *ja* produced in the examples above, two were disagreed with (Examples (1) and (5)),<sup>40</sup> six were agreed with (Examples (3), (4), (9), (10), (14), (26)), and nineteen lacked a second pair part response. The fact that the interactions occurred on a form of asynchronous computer-mediated communication may account for the large number of assessments that lack a response. As noted above, instances of missing second pair parts were also

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<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that the assessment in Example (1) functions as a self-deprecation, and therefore disagreement with that self-deprecation is a preferred response. In Example (5), the co-participant simply disagrees with the assessment made by the original commenter.

observed in studies on internet relay chats (Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm 2006) and internet newsgroups (Marcoccia 2004). Furthermore, when looking at assessments produced within this data corpus that do not contain the modal particle *ja*, I found that many of them were also not responded to by co-participants in a following comment. Two of the assessments with *ja* (Examples (2), (7)) that were not responded to by co-participants were not addressed to a specific recipient, as they were posted under a photo within an album, and thus the lack of a specific addressee may be why they lack a response. It is also important to note that twelve of the nineteen assessments that lack a response were produced as either second pair parts of an adjacency pair or as sequence-closing thirds, and thus the position of these assessments within the sequence of interaction may justify why co-participants did not respond to the assessments in subsequent comments. That leaves four assessments that were specifically addressed to a co-participant, yet unacknowledged by the co-participant in a following post.

As shown in the analyses above, there were some instances where a particular example of the modal particle *ja* aligned with findings from previous studies on modal particles, particularly those conducted by Weydt (1969), Weydt et al. (1983), and Helbig (1988). When I compare my analyses of the collected assessments containing *ja* with previous studies by König (1997) and Waltereit (2001) about the semantic functioning of modal particles within assertions, I find many instances where their findings apply to the usage of *ja* in assessment sequences within this data corpus. According to König (1997) and Waltereit (2001), “*ja* in assertions signals that the speaker assumes that strong evidence for the propositional content of the utterance is available in the situation,” and the evidence is either visually apparent in the situation or available through previous knowledge held by both participants (Waltereit 2001, p. 1398, König 1997, p. 70). Within this data corpus, nine assessments containing *ja* refer to shared knowledge of the event in question or to common sense knowledge, while eighteen assessments with *ja* have the referent visually present either as a picture or previously posted comment that can be viewed on the participants’ profile walls; in any case, every assessment containing *ja* that was analyzed in this study has evidence in support of the evaluation available to both participants.



König (1997) also claims that assertions with *ja* reveal a speaker's assumption that the proposition being made should be obvious to the co-participant, and therefore agreed with. As discussed above, six assessments containing *ja* were agreed with, while nineteen were not responded to; however, a lack of response also implies a lack of refutation. Put differently, even though nineteen assessments with *ja* were not explicitly agreed with, they were also not explicitly disagreed with. It is possible that the nineteen unanswered assessments containing *ja* could have been interpreted by their recipients to be non-controversial, and thus no further commentary on the issue was required. Therefore, I suggest that not responding to a comment could be seen as a way to tacitly agree, as participants do not feel the need to respond because the evaluation is not controversial. Regardless, a lack of response only allows me to speculate how the assessments with *ja* were interpreted. So, I turn to the eight assessments that were actually responded to, where six of the eight aligned with their first pair part; therefore, agreement is indeed the more frequent response (when a response is provided). We see that König's (1997) claims about the function of *ja* may be applicable for many of the examples discussed in this study, and thus this study provides examples of naturally occurring, unelicited data that support his findings.

In any case, this study provides insight into how native Germans converse on the internet, and we see that the modal particle *ja* occurs within assessments produced as part of naturally occurring interactions on the social networking website studiVZ. The effect of communicating through this particular medium has been taken into account in the above analyses of the interactional environments of *ja*. I found that although computer-mediated communication restricts the use of nonverbal cues which assist in the pragmatic interpretation of comments, users adapted to the medium and produced emoticons, written pauses, and modal particles in order to communicate effectively on this novel form of communication.

According to Weydt (1983), the German language that is learned by second-language learners is often not the same German which is spoken and used daily by native speakers; it often sounds "awkward," "stiff," and unnatural due to a lack of particle usage (Weydt et al. 1983). Previous studies on modal particles do not provide the most useful reference for teaching and understanding how and when to use particles in natural,

unelicited communication. However, if more research is conducted on particles and their interactional function in the German language, then advancements can be made in the teaching and learning of particles. With a better understanding of the interactional environments and function of the modal particle *ja*, a non-native speaker of German can:

- more fully understand the pragmatics of an interaction with a native speaker of German
- produce more authentic-sounding German
- implicitly perform a variety of speech events
- communicate in German to the fullest extent of the language through the usage of this unique lexical item

Unlike any of the previous studies conducted on modal particles, this study provides a detailed description of the interactional environments in which the modal particle *ja* occurs within assessments produced on studiVZ. Recognizing the different usages of *ja* contributes to findings used to categorize this particular lexical item, as well as to a description of their pragmatic function. Referring to socio-cultural perspectives on language teaching and learning, this study emphasizes the importance of interaction in order to acquire competency of a second-language; the acquisition of particles into one's lexicon can usually only be learned through interaction with native speakers who frequently use modal particles. However, since this experience is not readily available to most second-language learners of German, a resource based on recent, naturally occurring data which provides authentic examples of how and when to use particles would greatly benefit the German-as-a-foreign-language learning community; this study contributes to the findings necessary for such a resource.

## Endnotes:

<sup>i</sup> In German, the finite and non-finite parts of the verb phrase form a *Klammer* ‘parentheses’ around the other constituents of the sentence/phrase. The area before the first ‘parenthesis’ is called the *Vorfeld* ‘forefield,’ which is always occupied by a constituent (noun phrase, pronoun, prepositional phrase, conjunction, dependent clause, etc). The area between the ‘parentheses’ is called the *Mittelfeld* ‘middle field,’ which can contain basically all types of constituents (including modal particles). The area after the second ‘parenthesis’ is called the *Nachfeld* ‘after field.’ The examples below show the structure of a German sentence with the finite verb in the second position (the usual form of German sentences), with the finite verb in the first position (the usual form for questions and imperative sentences), and with the finite verb in the last position (the usual form for subordinate clauses).

FOREFIELD	FINITE VERB	MITTLE FIELD	NON-FINITE VERB PART
<i>Kari</i>	<i>hat</i>	<i>ja gestern für ihren Freund ein Geschenk</i>	<i>ausgesucht.</i>
<i>Gestern</i>	<i>hat</i>	<i>Kari ja für ihren Freund ein Geschenk</i>	<i>ausgesucht.</i>
<i>Kari</i>	<i>will</i>	<i>ja für ihren Freund ein Geschenk</i>	<i>aussuchen.</i>
<i>Ein Geschenk</i>	<i>will</i>	<i>Kari ja für ihren Freund</i>	<i>aussuchen.</i>

FINITE VERB	MITTLE FIELD	NON-FINITE VERB PART
<i>Hat</i>	<i>Kari für ihren Freund ein Geschenk</i>	<i>ausgesucht?</i>

CONJUNCTION	MITTLE FIELD	NON-FINITE AND FINITE VERB PARTS
<i>... dass</i>	<i>Kari für ihren Freund ein Geschenk</i>	<i>ausgesucht hat</i>
<i>... dass</i>	<i>Kari für ihren Freund ein Geschenk</i>	<i>aussuchen soll</i>

[Eisenberg et al. 1998, p. 817-821]

<sup>ii</sup> Example 11 is the only sample collected in which a multi-party conversation occurred through postings on three different users’ profile walls. However, the participants interact with each other individually on each other’s profiles, with the only evidence that the conversation involves multiple participants being a comment (line 17) addressed to both participants (although posted on only one of the participants’ walls). Besides this one comment referring to both participants, none of the other comments in the conversation seem to be addressed to anyone other than the user whose wall the comment is posted on.

<sup>iii</sup> Repair initiations in verbal interaction and online chats are often produced by participants when a co-participant does not provide a second pair part. Tanskanen and Karhukorpi (2008) found instances of concessive repair in e-mail discourse (which is similar to bulletin boards postings in its asynchronism), but the repair devices they examined were self-initiated and pre-emptive. Although it appears that missing second pair parts are routinely treated as ‘noticeably absent’ in this data corpus, instances of repair were not specifically examined in this study, and therefore I cannot assuredly claim that a missing second pair part is ‘noticeably absent’ by participants in a conversation. Note that Schönfeldt and Golato (2003) found that second pair parts can indeed be noticeably absent in conversations held in web chats, as shown through their analysis of repair initiations.

<sup>iv</sup> Below is a transcription example of the production of a preferred second pair part in a verbal conversation.

**Acceptance turn design**  
(Atkinson & Drew, 1979)

A: why don’t you come up and see me  
some[times]

B: [I would like to

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Below is a transcription example of the production of a dispreferred second pair part in a verbal conversation.

**Rejection turn design:**

(Atkinson & Drew, 1979)

A: Uh if you'd care to come and visit a little  
while this morning I'll give you a cup of  
coffee

B: hehh well that's awfully sweet of you, I don't think I can make it this morning. .hh uhm I'm running an  
ad in the paper and –and uh I have to stay near the phone

[Both examples above are cited by Levinson (1983)]

<sup>v</sup> Below I have provided two examples from Auer and Uhmman's (1982) study of second assessments. I have individually underlined the two parts of the second assessments within these examples in order to demonstrate their two-part structure.

**Second assessment showing agreement**

\*07 X.: aber ich fand die hundertfünfzig auch schon nicht schlecht

\*\*08 H.: och ja is schon ganz gut

**Second assessment showing disagreement**

\*03 Q.: sehr gutes Zeugnis

\*\*04 P.: naja sehr gut;

05 (1.0)

06 sehr gut [kann mas doch a net heißen]

07 Q.: [relativ sehr gutes Zeugnis]

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[Auer & Uhmman 1982, p. 9, 11]

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## APPENDIX 1: EXPLANATION OF TRANSCRIPTION NOTATION

It should be noted that although an interlinear gloss and an idiomatic translation from German into English have been provided for the examples, the transcripts are otherwise unchanged from their original appearance. Thus, the diacritical marks usually used in conversation analysis transcription notation of spoken discourse appear in the transcripts for this study as spelling conventions and punctuation markings which were originally produced by the commenter.

<i>mp</i>	=	modal particle
<i>sp</i>	=	separable prefix (of a separable prefix verb)
<i>rf</i>	=	reflexive pronoun
<i>lg</i>	=	a shortening of the phrase <i>liebe Grüße</i> ‘dear regards’ or ‘best wishes’
<i>vll, vllt</i>	=	<i>vielleicht</i> ‘perhaps’

### Emoticons

:)	:D	:~)	:DD	=	[se]	=	smile emoticon
XD	XDD	=)					
:-D	:)						
;) ;~)	;D		=	[wse]	=	wink-smile emoticon	
;P			=	[wte]	=	wink-tongue-sticking-out emoticon	
^^			=	[ese]	=	eyebrow-smile emoticon	
:P :-P =P			=	[te]	=	tongue-sticking-out emoticon	
*g*			=	[ffse]	=	front-facing-smile emoticon	
:(			=	[fe]	=	frown emoticon	
:-.			=	[ffme]	=	front-facing-melancholy emoticon	

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APPENDIX 2: COMPLETE TRANSCRIPTION OF EXAMPLES (8) AND (19)

## Example (8)

- 1 Claudia: womit hab ich denn den gruschler verdient?  
*whereby have I mp the [action] earned?*  
*With what have I earned the [action]?*
- 2 vlg, claudia :)  
*very dear regards, [name] [se]*  
*very best wishes, [name] [se]*
- 3 Paulo: naja dein profil und profilbild hat mir sehr gut gefallen, und da wollte ich dir  
*well your profile and profile+picture have to+me very good pleased, and there wanted I to+you*  
*well your profile and profile picture pleased me a lot, and because of that I wanted to*
- 4 einfach mal "Zuzwinkern"  
*simply once "wink+at"*  
*simply wink at you*
- 5 ;)   
*[wse]*  
*[wse]*
- 6 Claudia: aha, so nennt man das also ^^  
*aha, so name one that therefore [ese]*  
*aha, so one calls it that also [ese]*
- 7 Paulo: Du bist vergeben, dewegen zwinker ich nur zu  
*you are taken, therefore wink I only to*  
*you are taken, so I only wanted to wink*
- 8 (Nach deinem Profi l;) )  
*( on your profile [wse])*  
*( on your profile [wse])*
- 9 Claudia: achso, da ist jemand höflich, oder vllt doch nur vorsichtig? ;P[0]  
*I+see, there is someone polite, or perhaps mp only careful? [wte]*  
*I see, then you are being polite, or perhaps just careful? [wte]*
- 10 jaja, dieses eine kleine wörtchen wirkt ja schon  
*yes yes, this a small word seem mp already*  
*yes yes, this small word can be*
- 11 abschreckend ^^[0]



- 
- daunting [ese]  
daunting [ese]
- 12 Paulo: naja ich wollte höflich sein, muss dich ja nicht direkt vergraulen :P  
*well I wanted polite to+be, must you mp not directly scare+away [te]*  
*well I wanted to be polite, I must not directly scare you away [te]*
- 13 Claudia: tja, zu spät!  
*o well, too late!*  
*o well, too late!*
- 14 nein, scherz :D  
*no, joke [se]*  
*no, I am just joking [se]*
- 15 danke für die einladung ^^  
*thanks for the invitation [ese]*  
*thanks for the invitation [ese]*
- 16 Paulo: Immer wieder gerne ;)  
*always again gladly [wse]*  
*Time and again my pleasure [wse]*
- 17 Was machste denn so?  
*what do+you then so?*  
*What are you doing?*
- 18 Claudia: ich bin ein junky und zocke im internet  
*I am a junky and gamble on+the internet*  
*I am a junky and I am gambling on the internet*
- 19 außerdem höre ich musik und versuche mich  
*besides hear I music and try rf*  
*besides that, I am listening to music and trying*
- 20 krampfhaft wachzuhalten, damit sich mein  
*frantically awake+to+keep, so+that rf my*  
*frantically to stay awake, so my*
- 21 schlafrythmus wieder normalisiert, bevor es am  
*sleep+rhythem again normalizes, before it on*  
*sleep schedule can normalize before I have to*
- 22 mittwoch wieder in die schule geht xD  
*Wednesday again in the school goes [se]*

- 
- 23 *go to school again on Wednesday [se]*  
 die letzte nacht überhaupt nicht geschlafen :D  
*the last night overall not slept [se]*  
*Last night I didn't sleep at all [se]*
- 24 und du? :P  
*and you? [te]*  
*and you? [te]*
- 25 Paulo: Internetjunky...was zockst du denn so?  
*Internetjunky ... what gamble you then so?*  
*Internetjunk ... what do you gamble on?*
- 26 Kenn das hatte das von Samstag auf Montag ;)  
*know that had that from Saturday to Monday [wse]*  
*I know what you mean I had the same thing from Saturday to Monday[wse]*
- 27 Aber erfolglos. Bin dan ohne Schlaf arbeiten gegangen.  
*but unsuccessfully. am then without sleep work went.*  
*but unsuccessfully. I went to work without sleep.*
- 28 LG Peter  
*dear regards [name]*  
*best wishes [name]*
- 29 Claudia: ich bin bei king.com angemeldet, da kann man verdammt viele minispiele  
*I am at [website] registered, there can one mighty many mini+games*  
*I am registered at [website], there one can play a great many mini-games*
- 30 spielen, und die machen echt süchtig xD  
*play, and they make really addicted [se]*  
*and they are really addicting [se]*
- 31 kannst ja mal reinschaun ^^  
*can mp once drop+in [ese]*  
*you can check it out [ese]*
- 32 ohne schlaf kann man mich in die ecke stellen und was weiß ich was  
*without sleep can one rf in the corner put and what know I what*  
*without sleep one can put me in the corner and I don't know what*
- 33 veranstalten, ich bin ein murmeltier und ich liebe schlaf xDD  
*arrange, I am a groundhog and I love sleep [se]*

- 
- 34 *all to do, I am a groundhog and I love sleep [se]*  
greet  
*greetings*  
*greetings*
- 35 Paulo: ja wenn ich mal was mehr zeit hab guck ich mir das mal gerne an :)  
*yes when I once what more time have look I to+me that once gladly at [se]*  
*yea when I have some more time I will gladly check it out [se]*
- 36 jaja "sonstwas" machen, hört sich **ja** nett an :P  
*yes+yes "something+else" do, sounds rf mp nice sp [te]*  
*yea to do "something else" sounds nice [te]*
- 37 ich liebe auch schlaf und besonders viel schlaf  
*I love also sleep and especially much sleep*  
*I also love sleep and especially a lot of sleep*
- 38 aber manchmal haut das manchmal nicht hin :(  
*But sometimes work that sometimes not sp [fe]*  
*But that sometimes does not work out well [fe]*

#### Example (19)

- 1 Claudia: womit hab ich denn die freundschaftseinladung verdient? =)  
*whereby have I mp the friendship+invitation earned? [se]*  
*With what have I earned the friendship invitation? [se]*
- 2 viele liebe grüße  
*many dear regards*  
*many dear regards*
- 3 claudia ^^  
*[name] [ese]*  
*[name] [ese]*
- 4 Alyson: hey Claudia  
*hey [name]*  
*hey [name]*
- 5 ich habe für Wintersemester 2007 an der Uni B. studiert und dort habe  
*I have for winter+semester 2007 at the [university] studied and there have*  
*I studied at the [university] during the winter semester of 2007 and I got to know*
- 6 ich viele cool Leute kennengelernt -- Ich bin neugierig darüber, wie

- 
- I many cool people gotten+to+know -- I am curious about, how many cool people there -- I am curious about how*
- 7 Deutsche auf studiVZ kommuniziert, und ich mache gerade Forschung  
*Germans on studiVZ communicate, and I do currently research*  
*Germans communicate on studiVZ, and I am currently conducting research*
- 8 daran. Ich habe deine Seite auf einer Seite meines Freundes gesehen –  
*on+it. I have your page on a page of+my friends saw -*  
*on the subject. I saw your profile page on one of my friends pages -*
- 9 deshalb habe ich dir eine freundschaftseinladung geschickt. muss mal sagen –  
*Therefore have I to+you a friendship+invitation sent. must once say --*  
*So I sent you a friendship invitation. I must say --*
- 10 ich habe einen guten Freund, der aus D. kommt -- als ich in  
*I have a good friend, that from [city] comes – when I in*  
*I have a good friend who comes from [city] -- when I was in*
- 11 Deutschland war, habe ich oft die Stadt besucht. Vielen Dank für deine  
*Germany was, have I often the city visited. Many thanks for your*  
*Germany, I often visited the city. Thanks a lot for your*
- 12 Freundschaft auf studiVZ und wenn du Fragen über meine Forschung  
*Friendship on studiVZ and if you questions about my research*  
*friendship on studiVZ and if you have any questions about*
- 13 stellen moechtest, bitte sag mir einfach Bescheid  
*set would+like, please say to+me simply notification*  
*my research, please just let me know*
- 14 peace : Alyson  
*Peace : Alyson*  
*peace : Alyson*
- 15 Claudia: hi ^^ hört sich **ja** interessant an, was ist das denn für eine forschung?  
*Hi[ese]sounds rf mp interesting sp, what is that mp for a research?*  
*Hi [ese] that sounds interesting, what type of research is it?*
- 16 vlg, claudia =)  
*many best regards, [name] [se]*  
*many best regards, [name][se]*
- 17 Alyson: dear Claudia:
- 18 so i'm going to write this in English because I don't know all of the terms in

---

19 German -- if it's confusing i can try again later in German. ok so my  
 20 research is on Modalpartikeln (specifically "ja", "doch" and "auch") and I  
 21 am looking at people's profiles to see if they appear in a natural written form  
 22 -- before the internet, Modalpartikeln were only used in VERBAL  
 23 communication, but now with the internet and text messaging, they are  
 24 being transferred to a written form. Your reply to my last message was  
 25 brilliant because you used "ja" and "denn" as Modalpartikeln -- just as an  
 26 example. I am simply marking if native Germans use them on the internet (i  
 27 have a tally sheet... literally...). As a non-native speaker of German, I have a  
 28 hard time understanding what these words mean and how they are used...  
 29 my hope is to examine how they are used, in what environments they  
 30 appear, etc. and then to be able to compose some type of helpful "rules" or  
 31 "guidelines" for non-native speakers that would help in understanding how  
 32 Modalpartikeln function. wow that's a lot. Sorry -- have a good weekend!  
 33 Vielen Dank fuer deine Interesse!  
 34 cheers  
 35 :alyson

36 Claudia: hiho ^^ wow, ich bin schwer beeindruckt, nicht mal deutsche setzten sich so  
*hey [ese] wow, I am very impressed, not once Germans place rf so*  
*hey [ese], wow I am very impressed, not only Germans arrange put their*  
 37 sehr mit der eigenen grammatik auseinander, du hast meinen respekt =)  
*very with the own grammar apart, you have my respect [se]*  
*grammer so scrambled, you have my respect [se]*  
 38 aber dieses phänpmen kenn ich nur zu gut, es ist einfach viel leichter in  
*but this phenomenon know I only too good, it is simply much easier in*  
*But I know this phenomenon quite well, it is simply much easier to*  
 39 einem chat-room messages zu schreiben, als früher zum beispiel einen brief  
*a chat-room messages to write, as earlier for example a letter*  
*write messages in a chat-room, compared to earlier for example in a letter*  
 40 (im chat kann man ja auch alles klein schreiben, ohne, dass sich jemand  
*(in+the chat can one mp also everything small write, without, that rf someone*  
*(in a chat one can write everything small, without anyone getting upset*

- 
- 41            daran stört! und dies beschleunigt die kommunikation ungemein ^^)  
                  *at+it upsets! and this accelerates the communication immensely [ese])*  
                  *about it! and this accelerates the communcation immensely [ese])*
- 42            kannst dich ja vielleicht mal melden, wenn du schon eine regel aufgestellt  
                  *can you mp perhaps once message, when you mp a rule establish*  
                  *You can maybe send me a message, when you have established a rule*
- 43            hast =P  
                  *has [te]*  
                  *[te]*
- 44            vlg, claudia ^^  
                  *many dear regards, [name] [ese]*  
                  *many best wishes, [name] [ese]*
- 45            PS: wow, es ist wirklich wahr, die modalpartikel werden ja andauernd  
                  *PS: wow, it is really true, the modal+particles were mp constantly*  
                  *PS: wow, it is really true, the modal particles were used constantly!*
- 46            gebraucht! da! schon wieder xD  
                  *used! there! already again [se]*  
                  *there! again! [se]*